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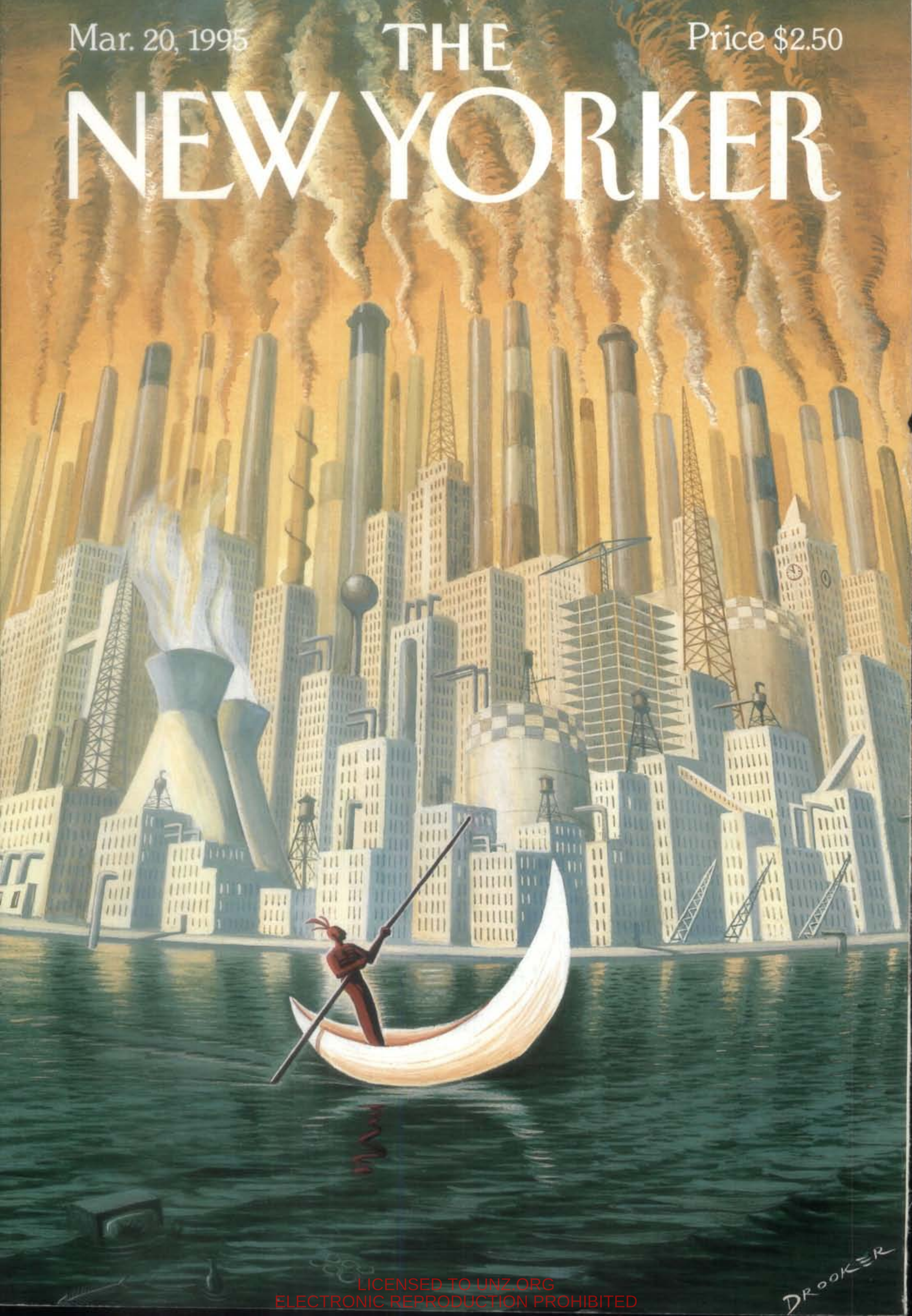

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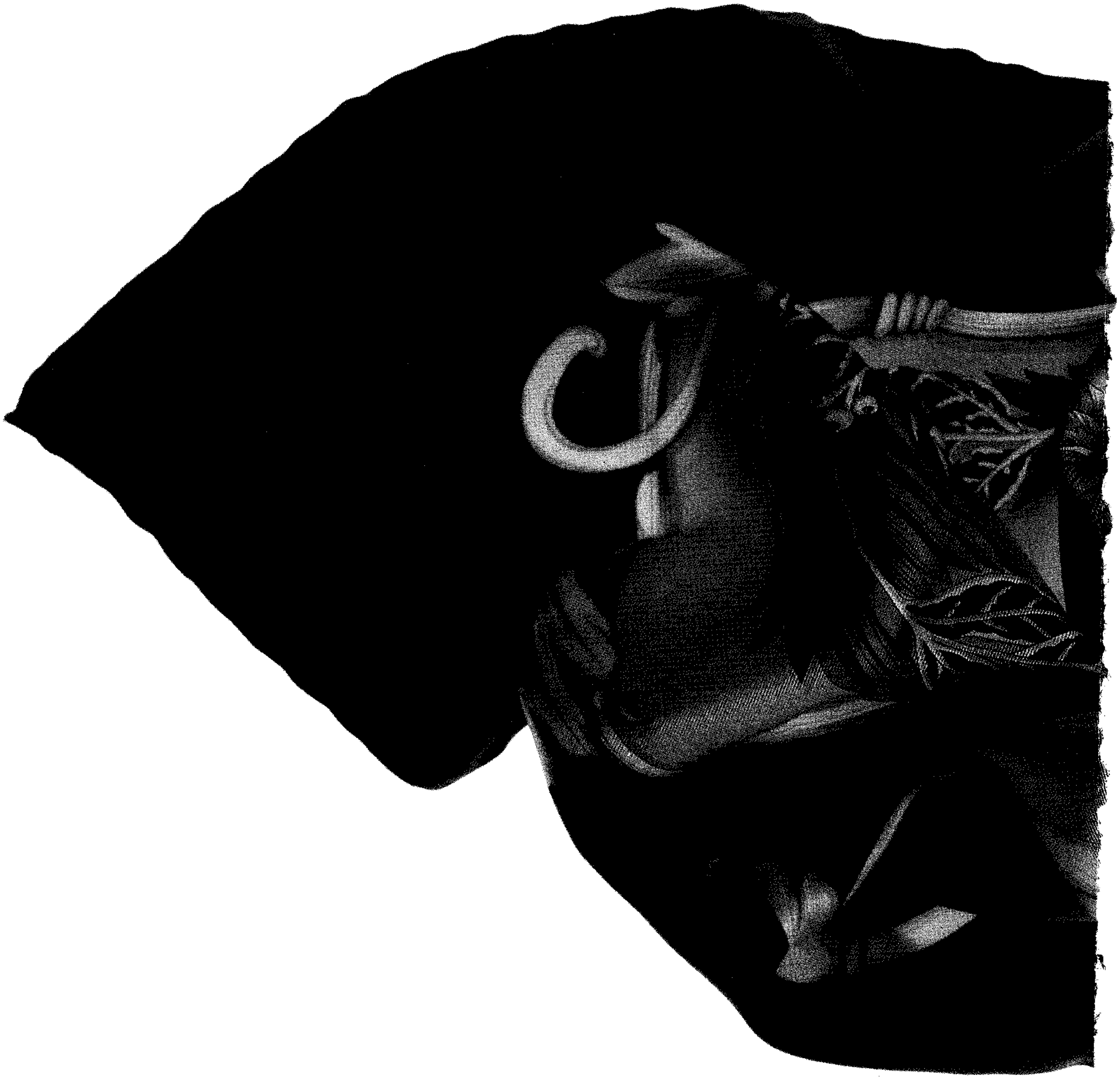

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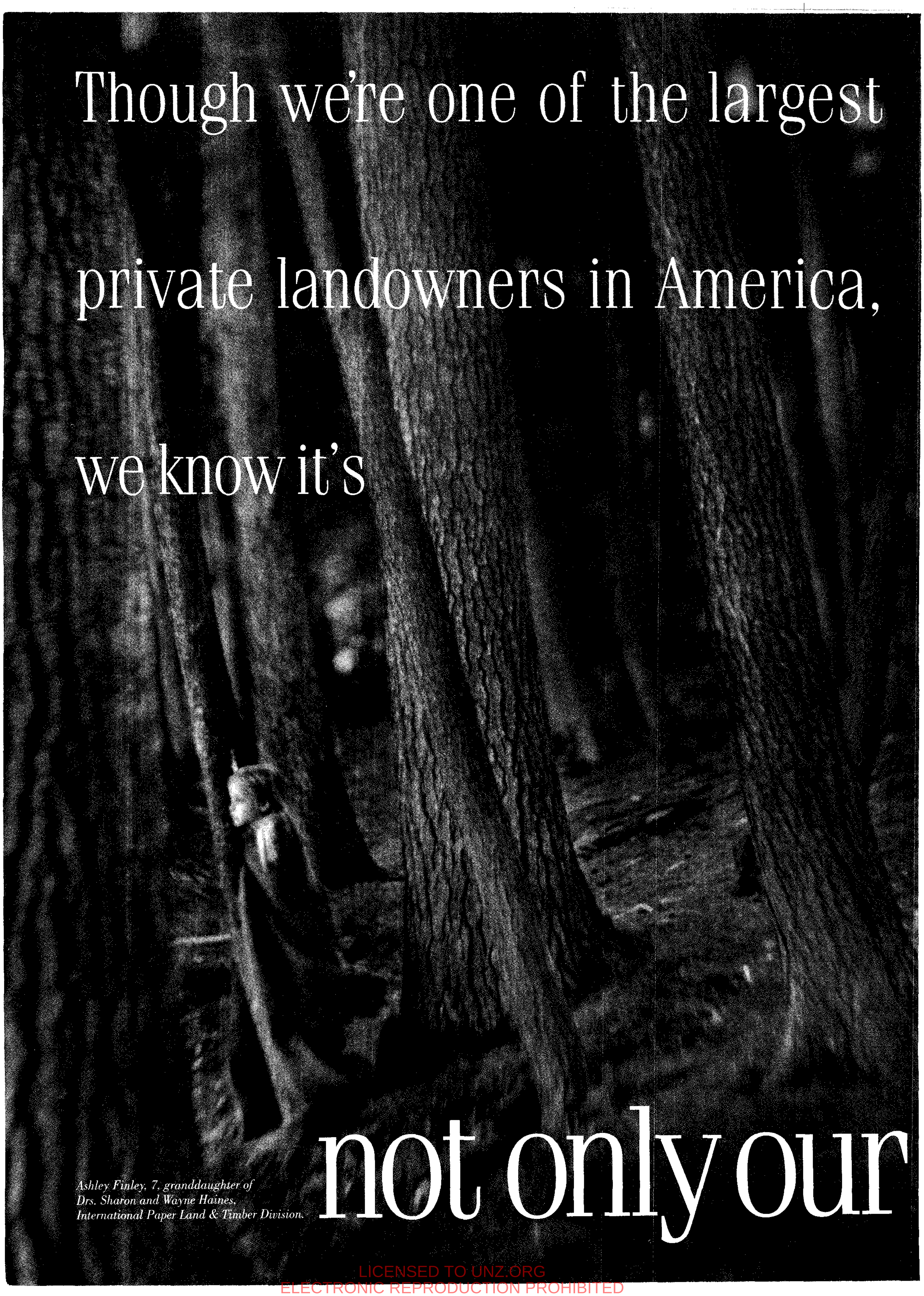
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RANDOM HOUSE

THE NEW YORKER

MARCH 20, 1995

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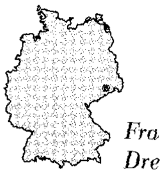

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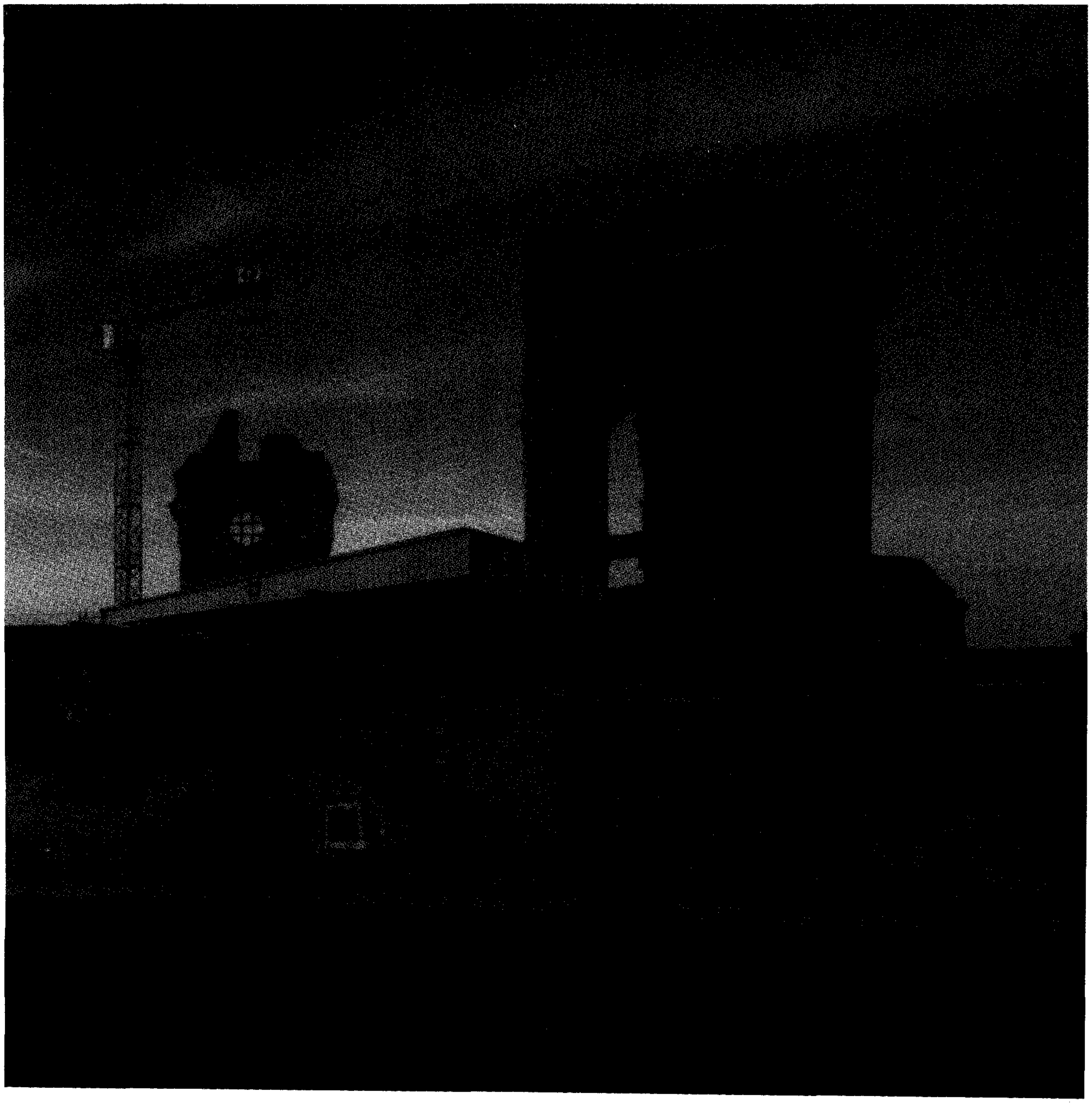
IN DRESDEN, FREEDOM RISES FROM THE RUBBLE. Germany's greatest church, the Frauenkirche, was destroyed during Allied bombing in 1945. Where Bach and Wagner once performed, there now lies only broken rock. But recently, stonemason Franz Huber and a team of other artisans and architects began to painstakingly resurrect the city's symbol of harmony. Once IBM reconstructed the Baroque



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COMMENT

MOTHERHOOD ISSUE

Marcia Clark isn't the only one who's got troubles.

In recent years, a comforting theory has lifted some of the burden of guilt from the shoulders of many a working mother. The theory holds that offspring are happy when parents are happy, so a mother's decision to devote herself to a demanding, fulfilling career is in the best interests of her entire family. Strong, happy mothers rear strong, happy children. Such is the theory; such, at least, is the hope.

Even so, for many working mothers the suspicion lingers that, as Nora Ephron once wrote, most kids would rather have their mothers on the brink of suicide in the next room than happy anywhere else. At one point or another, almost every working mother is afflicted by creeping doubts about whether the choices she has made may not have been simply selfish. No wonder, then, that the personal predicament in which Marcia Clark, the chief prosecutor in the O. J. Simpson case, finds herself has provoked strong and complicated feelings—anxiety, anger, indignation, empathy—in a great many professional women with young children.

As anyone following the case surely knows by now, Ms. Clark's estranged husband—a computer engineer, whose job is far less demanding than hers—is seeking primary custody of the couple's two sons, aged three and five, on the ground that their mother "is never home, and never has any time to spend with them." If the whiny sullenness of this complaint sounds a trifle juvenile, that is hardly an occasion for surprise: the world has come to expect people locked in custody battles to behave at least as childishly as the minors they are fighting over. And Ms. Clark has made her share of moves that do little to enhance her status as a passive victim of male churlishness. She has demanded that her husband, whose income is significantly less than her own, increase the support he is paying her in order to cover, among other things, the more glamorous wardrobe her new fame requires and the additional babysitting she now needs—even though, he claims, he has been willing to care for the children himself. It also happens that a couple of years ago Ms. Clark's employer, Los Angeles County, offered her a less demanding job, with shorter hours, at no diminution in salary, and that she tried

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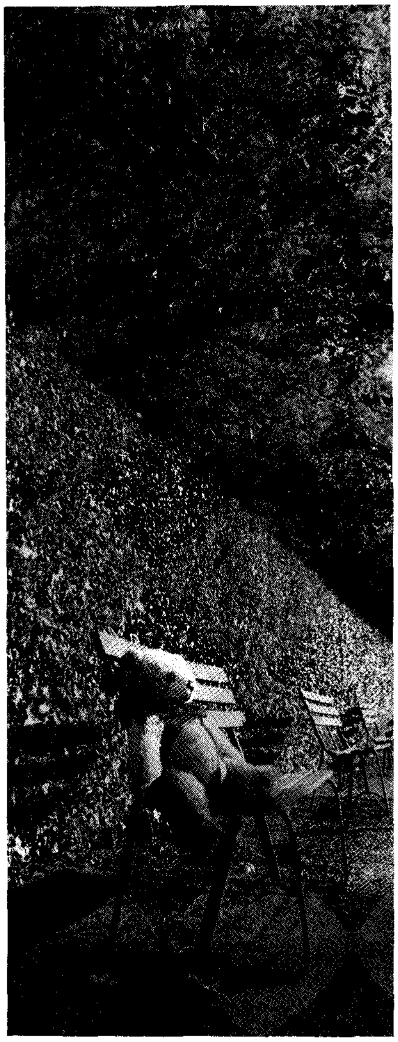

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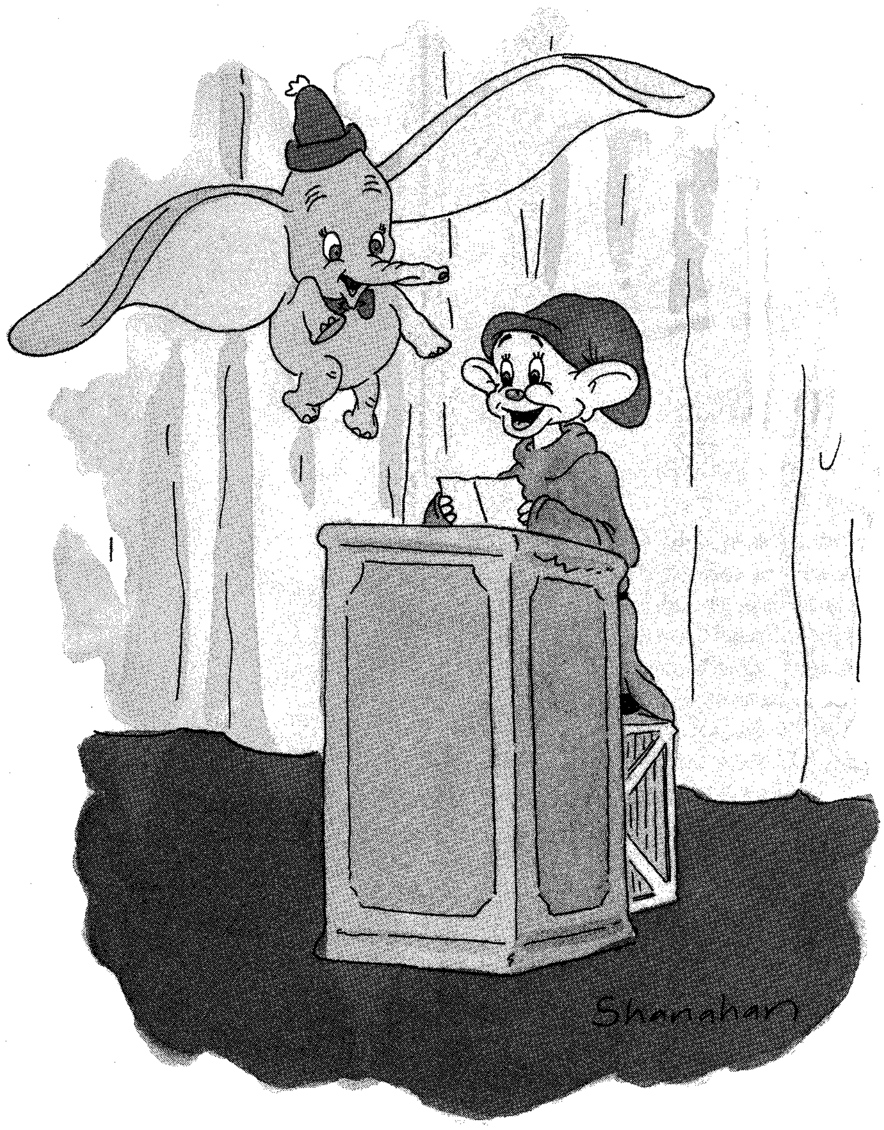


"And the Oscar goes to . . . 'Forrest Gump'!"

• •

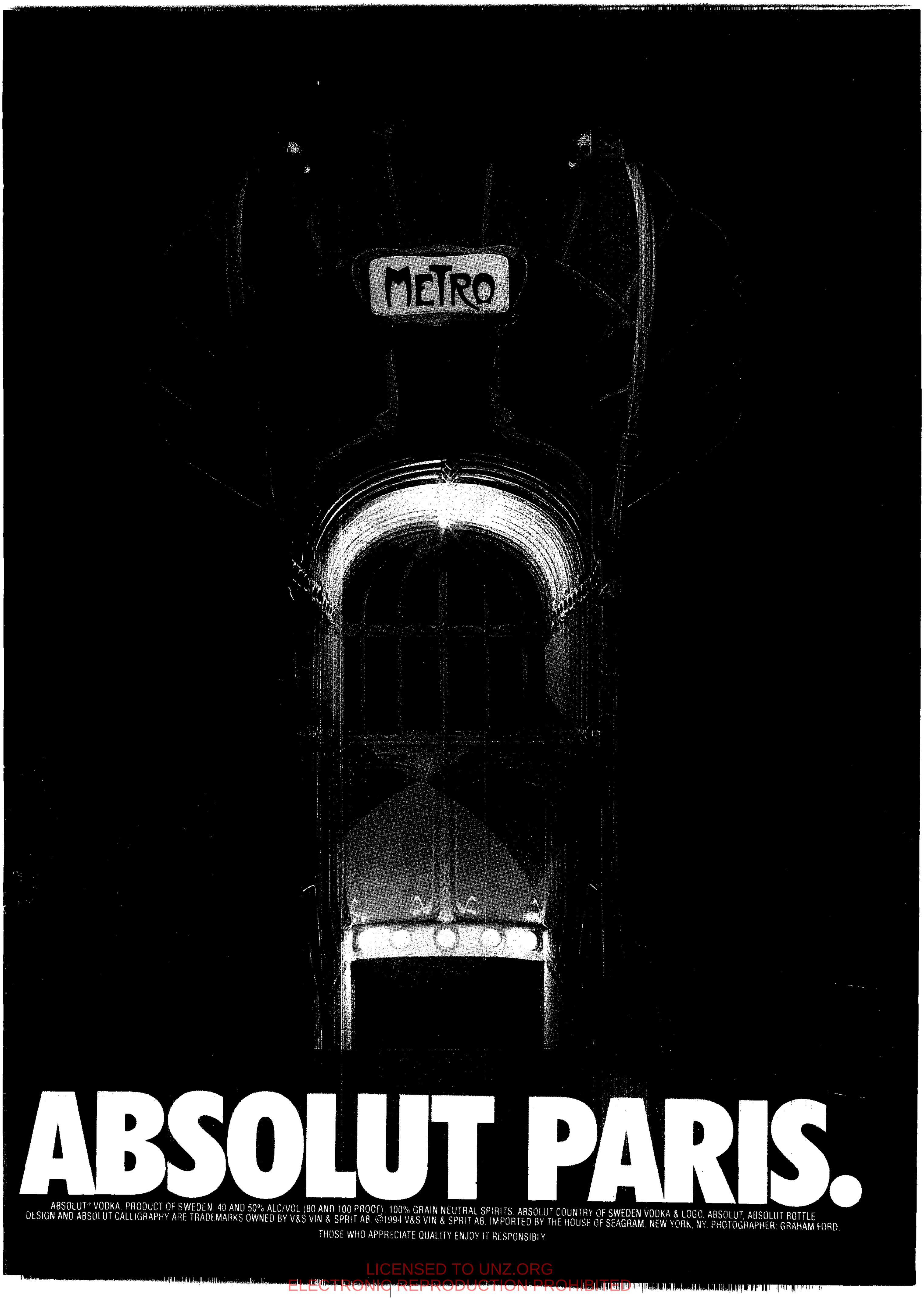
the lighter job, but it was not to her liking: she didn't want to be a humdrum supervisor, she wanted to excel in the most challenging and difficult area of her field. Her ambition has cost her sympathy. As Judy Markey, a columnist for the Chicago *Sun-Times*, scolded her, "we can't always be great all the time at all the things we have to do."

Unless, perhaps, "we" are male. In the microcosm of the Simpson courtroom, the double standard for the two sexes is stark. While Ms. Clark is staving off trumpeted accusations of maternal unfitness, and may have to pay the price by losing custody of her children, it has been rather less noted that Johnnie L. Cochran, Jr., Mr. Simpson's most visible defense attorney, is the target of a soon to be filed palimony suit. According to the Associated Press, Mr. Cochran, who is on his second marriage, has retained counsel to defend him against the charge by a former mistress (with whom he had a son out of wedlock some two decades ago) that he owes her financial support. While the news of Ms. Clark's possible parental shortcomings has been page-one tabloid fodder—EX ON CLARK: BAD MOM, GOOD PROSECUTOR, screamed New York *Newsday*—Mr. Cochran's problem is sidebar material. Men like Mr. Cochran bask in their success, and no one begrudges it to them; women like Ms. Clark cannot do the same, because they are constantly aware of and constantly accountable for its costs.

In certain respects, this imbalance mirrors a feature of the legislative juggernaut now rolling through the House of Representatives and, more bumpily, the Senate. Against the background of endless encomiums to "family values," many of them delivered by men who have shed the wives they brought to Washington in favor of younger, glossier ones, there is near-universal agreement that ways must be found to insure that welfare mothers work (though if Ms. Clark's example is any guide they had better not work too hard). There is much talk of pregnant teen-agers, of crack mothers, of welfare "queens"—legitimate concerns all, to be sure. But where in the debate over Speaker Gingrich's proposed Personal Responsibility Act are the *impregnating* teen-agers, the crack fathers, the welfare "kings"? As Katha Pollitt noted in a recent column in *The Nation*, what many of the sermons about how government can't substitute for loving, caring parents overlook is the fact that "it is not the mother's care that welfare replaces but the father's cash." It is hard not to see a double standard in the current attack at every level of government on policies that make the lives of poor and also middle-class working women a little easier: cuts in child care, cuts in public education, cuts in after-school programs and in-school lunches, cuts in family planning, elimination of nutrition and medical programs for pregnant women and new mothers, escalating threats to safe abortion, and a broad reconsideration of affirmative action, in part because it is thought that women have benefitted more from it than any other groups. Yet the desirably configured family of conservative orthodoxy—Dad at the office, Mom in apron at home with the kids—is a vanishing option in part because of market forces celebrated by the same orthodoxy.

At the higher, Marcia Clark end of the income scale, women pay in subtler ways for being working mothers. When was the last time a prominent professional man was held up to front-page scrutiny for spending too many weekends at the office for his kids' good? In truth, most parents, of both sexes, feel caught in a tightening vise. Yet the punitive focus has a way of coming back to female behavior. It's enough to make a working mother stay home and ponder suicide in the next room. At least the gun to her head would be her own.

—JANE MAYER



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IN THE MAIL

FOREIGN AID ASSESSED

Michael Kinsley, in his Comment "The Intellectual Free Lunch" (February 6th), strangely criticizes our poll on foreign aid for trying to address the problem he bemoans: that policymakers are responsive to polls that do not check whether the public is informed enough to come to meaningful conclusions. In our poll we did check, and found that the median American assumes foreign-aid spending to be fifteen times what it really is, and that this perception prompts a majority to feel that foreign aid should be cut. Kinsley seems to conclude that this ill-informed public should be simply escorted off the stage of public debate. Instead, we took the time to ask many more questions. We found that a strong majority supported the values inherent in foreign aid and, on being presented with a breakdown of the actual spending, wanted to maintain or increase spending in most, but not all, areas. Certainly Kinsley is right that misinformed public opinion should not drive public policy. But, in a democracy, policy should be influenced by the public's values—values that can be helpfully clarified through polls that go beyond off-the-cuff reactions.

STEVEN KULL
Program on International Policy Attitudes
University of Maryland
College Park, Md.

Mr. Kinsley chastises Americans for having an opinion on how much of their tax dollars should be spent on foreign aid when they don't know that foreign aid is only one per cent of the United States budget. Kinsley should consider whether these opinions may be an expression of common sense rather than a result of ignorance. Many Americans want to know why the United States spends billions of dollars on the military defense of wealthy nations like Japan, South Korea, Germany, and Kuwait—billions that are not categorized by government accountants as "foreign aid." It seems to us that military protection of foreign countries should be included in any reasonable definition of foreign aid, as should military action incidental to the delivery of traditional foreign aid, like food and medical supplies. If the average American bases his opinion of our current level of foreign-aid spending on a more expansive definition than that used by the government accounting offices, then the discrepancies noted by Kinsley must be viewed in a different light. So perhaps it is Kinsley, rather than the average American, who needs to think through his opinions a bit more.

E. GERSTMANN
J. SAVAGE
Madison, Wis.

If the United States military is guilty of excess and waste, and Congress is given to pork-barrelling, why should John Q. Public not expect the same elsewhere? In the minds of most Americans, it is a question not only of what percentage of the budget is being spent on foreign aid but also of how effectively it is being used. The dollar amount may seem negligible in terms of the over-all budget, but it doesn't seem so to the average taxpayer, who wants fair value for any investment, small or large, private or governmental.

HARRY HOFFMAN
Dillsboro, Ind.

I disagree with Mr. Kinsley's assertion that Americans are willfully ignorant. Most Americans get their information from front-page headlines or from the evening news. Foreign-aid stories are routinely covered—

witness the saturation coverage of the Mexico "bailout." Welfare, too, is the subject of extensive coverage. But when was the last time you heard Peter Jennings say, "Good evening. Today, in a stunning development, the Office of Management and Budget announced that, for the fourth year in a row, foreign aid and welfare were less than one per cent of the budget. In a related story, the O.M.B. announced that Social Security payments are once again the largest budget item, dwarfing welfare payments by twenty-two to one"? The news media make no effort to educate the public on this issue. Until they do, the public will remain in the dark.

STEVEN NOVICK
Washington, D.C.

PARTY ON

Roz Roose ("The Life of the Party," by Jane Kramer, February 6th) is indeed the kind of individualist who makes New York the unpredictable and interesting place it can be. Several years ago, my mother, a fashion consultant, was walking on Fifth Avenue with a visitor from out of town. The visitor spotted what she took to be a bright-eyed bag lady, with a bird's nest of hair, wearing paint-stained, dishevelled clothes and munching on a bunch of scallions protruding from a paper bag. "God, you see *everything* in New York," my mother's companion said, and at that point Roz Roose screamed "Gerry!" and threw her arms around my mother—a friend and regular party guest of some forty years.

DOUGLAS BRIN
New York City

I am just so glad that you all love Roz Roose. Anyone who lives to drop names, break traffic laws, and worship at the shrine of a butcher like Stalin can't be all bad, can she?

BARBARA EVELAND
Eustis, Fla.

Letters should be as brief as possible, and sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number to "In the Mail," The New Yorker, 20 West 43rd Street, New York, N.Y. 10036. They may be edited for length and clarity.

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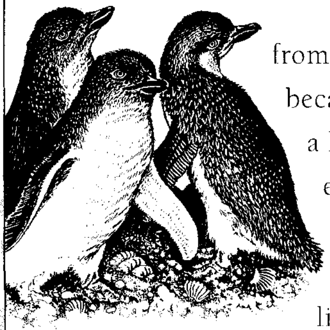

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GOINGS ON

ABOUT TOWN

THE THEATRE

No Second Acts

It wasn't so long ago that one-act plays seemed to be strictly high-school fare; then, suddenly, every professional theatre group was doing them. The one-act continues to draw fledgling talent, but household names are increasingly returning to the form. At Manhattan Class Company, the current bill includes work by seasoned, if not celebrity, artists, among them Peter Lefcourt, Patrick Breen, and Max Mayer. "Death Defying Acts," at the Variety Arts, features New York tales by Woody Allen and Elaine May, as well as a David Mamet play. "Miami Stories," at the American Jewish Theatre, presents a play by Saul Bellow together with a pair from Laurence Klavan (one of them based on a Bernard Malamud story). Theatregoers with stamina could take in a matinée at the Variety and spend the evening at A.J.T., on a New York-to-Miami marathon—call it the Jewish Shuttle.

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

(Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.)

Arcadia—The American première of Tom Stoppard's 1993 play, set in 1809 and the present. With Blair Brown and Victor Garber. In previews. (Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

Awake and Sing!—Tovah Feldshuh, Stephen Lang, and Avery Schreiber in a revival of Clifford Odets' 1935 drama about a struggling Bronx family. Previews continue through the matinée on March 19; opens that evening at 7. (Playhouse 91, 316 E. 91st St. 831-2000.)

Don Juan in Chicago—The legendary Spanish seducer leaves Seville for twentieth-century Chicago in a new comedy by David Ives (of "All in the Timing" fame). In previews. (Primary Stages, 354 W. 45th St. 333-4052.)

Family Business—The *fils-et-père* team of Ain and David Gordon wrote, directed, and appears in this comedy about a family of plumbers. Valda Setterfield (mother of Ain, wife of David) rounds out the cast. Previews through March 20. Opens March 21 at 8. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 302-6989.)

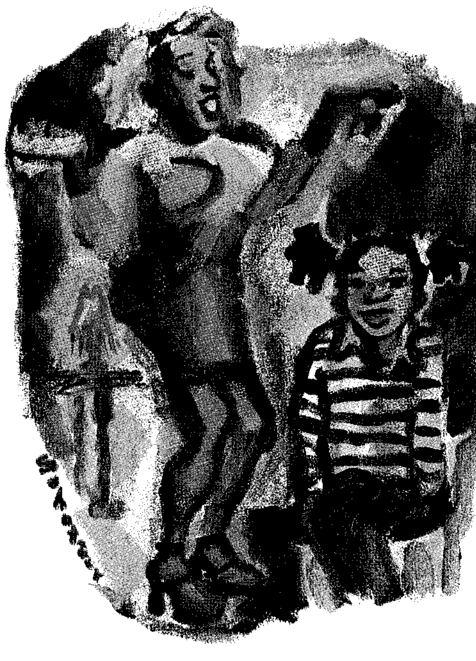
Having Our Say—Mary Alice and Gloria Foster star in an adaptation of Sarah Louise and Anne Elizabeth Delany's best-selling book "Having Our Say: The Delany Sisters' First 100 Years." Adapted and directed by Emily Mann. Previews begin March 16. (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying—Matthew Broderick is the ambitious window-washer J. Pierrepont Finch in this revival of the 1961 musical by Frank Loesser (score and lyrics) and Abe Burrows, Jack Weinstock, and Willie Gilbert (book). In previews. (Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 307-4100.)

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			15	16	17	18
19	20	21				

Incommunicado—Tom Dulack's drama about Ezra Pound's confinement on an American military base in Italy at the end of the Second World War. Tom Aldredge portrays the poet. Preview on March 15. Opens March 16 at 7:30. (Judith Anderson, 422 W. 42nd St. 279-4200.)

Miami Stories: Bellow, Malamud & Klavan—An evening of one-act comedies: Saul Bellow's "A Wen," Laurence Klavan and Martin Blank's "The Magic Barrel" (based on the story by Bernard Malamud), and Mr. Klavan's own "If Walls Could Talk." Previews through March 19. Opens March 20 at 8. (American Jewish Theatre, 307 W. 26th St. 633-9797.)



Keith Randolph Smith and Afi McClendon, in "Holiday Heart."

Rob Becker's Defending the Caveman—A one-man comedy about the relationship between men and women, written and performed by Mr. Becker. In previews. (Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 307-4100.)

Rush Limbaugh in Night School—In Charlie Varon's one-man play, the conservative talk-show host is taking Spanish at the New School with a bunch of left-wingers. In previews. (Second Stage, Broadway at 76th St. 239-6200.)

Translations—A new production of Brian Friel's 1981 play, starring Dana Delany, Brian Dennehy, Donal Donnelly, and Rufus Sewell. Howard Davies is the director. Previews through March 18. Opens March 19 at 6:30. (Plymouth, 236 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

OPENED RECENTLY

Beauty's Daughter—One of the dozen or so characters that Dael Orlandersmith portrays in her one-woman show offers this worldly counsel: "Never show your heart." Though she adopts a hard-shelled stage posture, her depictions of the characters in her native East Harlem neighborhood—some broken, some on the way down—are passionate and full of insight. Her style, a blend of impersonation and chant, can be heavy-handed sometimes, but she is attempting to reach those who are about to slide, and in the persona of a young woman named Dianne, she offers an example of someone who is determined to prevail. (American Place, 111 W. 46th St. 840-3074. Closes March 26.)

Camping with Henry & Tom—Henry Ford (John Cunningham), Thomas Edison (Robert Prosky), and Warren Harding (Ken Howard) are out camping one day. . . . So begins Mark St. Germain's fictional account of an actual woodland episode from 1921. The talk around the campfire is, unsurprisingly, about power: Ford lusts after it, Harding wants to abdicate it, and Edison doesn't give a good God damn. In the peaceful-looking copse that James Leonard Joy has designed, history comes alive, but it doesn't go much beyond the bickering and joshing of these three flawed titans. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 239-6200.)

Carmen—Ridiculous Theatrical Company playwrights Everett Quinton and Eureka have borrowed liberally from classic camp movies (especially "Caged") to come up with a suitably Ridiculous take on Prosper Mérimée's tragic tale. Quinton is in top form as the hot-blooded, coldhearted gypsy. (Charles Ludlam Theatre, 1 Sheridan Sq. 691-2271.)

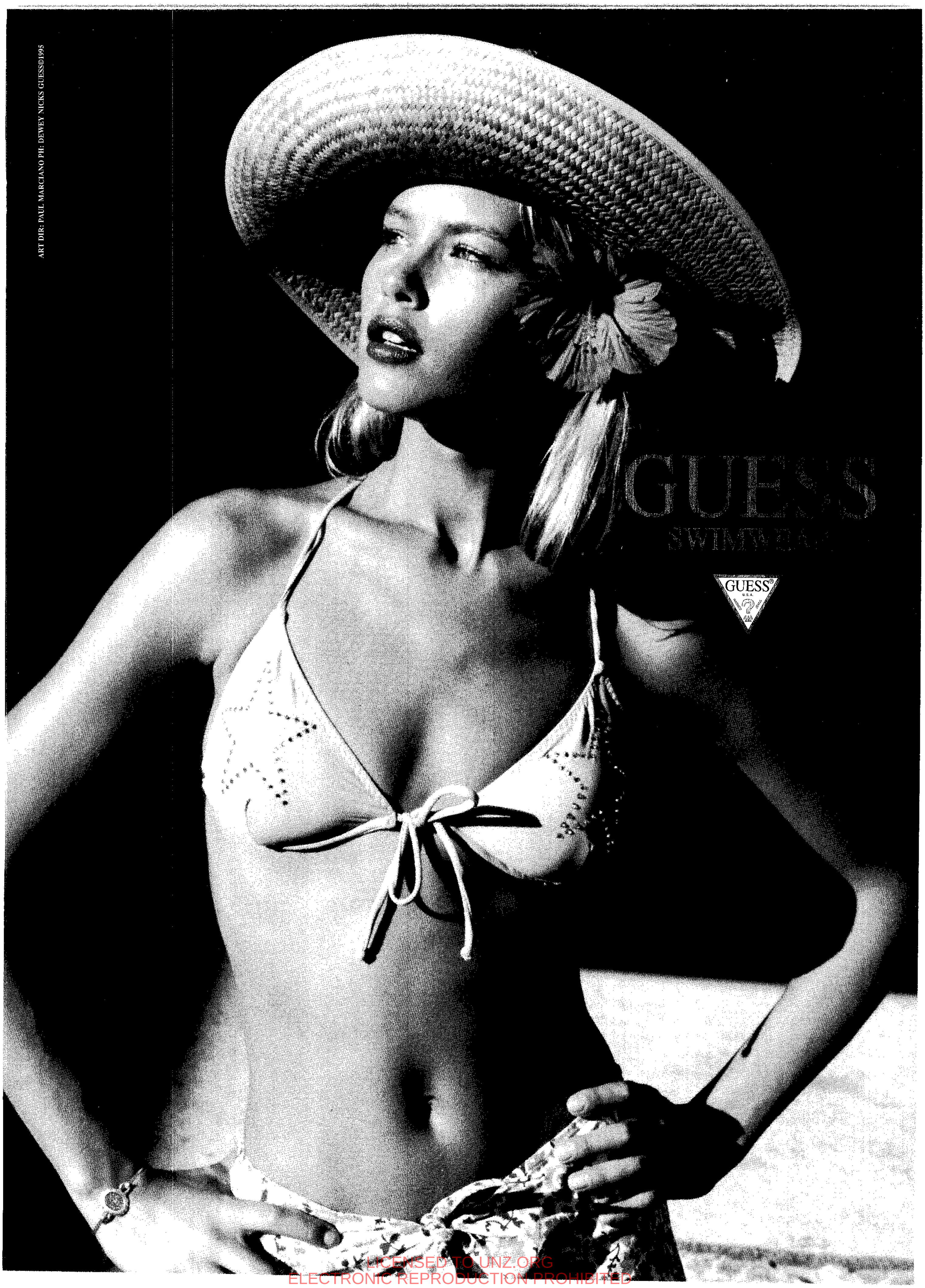
The Compleat Works of Wllm Shkspr (Abridged)—This slapstick hour and a half romp through the Bard's œuvre, carried out by three fine young gentlemen in high-tops, is utterly sophomoric and a complete waste of time—like some of the best things in life. (Westside Theatre, 407 W. 43rd St. 307-4100.)

Damn Yankees—A revival of the 1955 musical, with Jerry Lewis in his Broadway début, as Mr. Applegate. (Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 307-4100.)

Death Defying Acts—A trio of short plays by Woody Allen ("Central Park West"), David Mamet ("An Interview"), and Elaine May ("Hotline"). (Reviewed in this issue.) (Variety Arts, Third Ave. at 14th St. 239-6200.)

Hapgood—Tom Stoppard's 1988 play looks at the world of espionage through the lens of particle physics, and the production is as mesmerizing as the play is bewildering. Stockard Channing, Josef Sommer, and David Strathairn give confident, watchable performances. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 239-6200. Closes March 26.)

DENA SCHUTZER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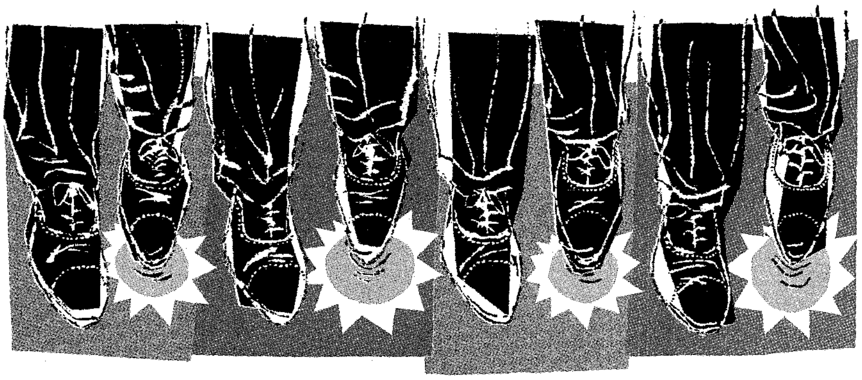
THE THEATRE—Cont'd

The Heiress—A revival of Ruth and Augustus Goetz's 1947 play based on the Henry James novel "Washington Square." (Reviewed in this issue.) (Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

Henry VI—This distillation of three plays into two long, fairly independent parts lays bare the machinations surrounding the Wars of the Roses—so bare, unfortunately, that there's little sense of character left, and you don't care who wins. A few actors (John Campion as the Duke of York, Jack Wetherall as the Earl of Warwick, Trellis Stepter as the young Richard III) invigorate their scenes through sheer force of personality, but for the most part there's a lot of yelling and running around on a very nice set. Adapted and directed by Barry Kyle. (St. Clement's, 423 W. 46th St. 279-4200.)



Manhattan Tap, at Alice Tully Hall.

Holiday Heart—Cheryl L. West's thoughtful and thought-provoking play, which takes place in inner-city Chicago, is named after its central character—an out-there, over-the-top drag queen (if that's not a tautology) who is the Rock of Gibraltar to a troubled next-door neighbor and her young daughter, and who is played with great vitality by Keith Randolph Smith. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

Jack's Holiday—Jack the Ripper comes to New York in 1891, in a new musical by Randy Courts and Mark St. Germain. With Allen Fitzpatrick in the title role, Judy Blazer, Greg Naughton, and Dennis Parlato. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 279-4200. Closes March 26.)

Jelly Roll!—The snakily elegant Vernel Bagneris plays Jelly Roll Morton, in a terrific show that traces the musician's transformation from New Orleans dandy into jazz legend. Morten Gunnar Larsen provides the thrilling piano accompaniment. (47th Street Theatre, 304 W. 47th St. 265-1086.)

Laura Dennis—The Signature Theatre Company concludes its Horton Foote season with this new play. (Kampo Cultural Center, 31 Bond St. 279-4200.)

Love! Valour! Compassion!—The eight gay men in Terrence McNally's beautifully written drama connect in ways that almost any nuclear family would envy. Under the nimble direction of Joe Mantello, seven actors (including Stephen Bogardus, John Glover—doing double duty as identical twins—and the wonderful Nathan Lane) present humbling evidence of what love is and can be. (11/14/94) (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

The Man Who—Director Peter Brook's adaptation of "The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat," Oliver Sacks' collection of case studies. (BAM's Majestic Theatre, 651 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 1-718 636-4100.)

Manhattan Class Company—The group's seventh annual one-act festival features plays by Peter Lefcourt ("Sweet Talk"), Rafael Lima ("Hard Hats"), Patrick Breen ("It's Almost Like a Favor That I Do"), and Tom Burnett ("The Rocks Have Ears"). (120 W. 28th St. 727-7765. Closes April 1.)

The Molière Comedies—Richard Wilbur dedicated his translations of "The School for Husbands" and "The Imaginary Cuckold" to Brian Bedford, and Mr. Bedford more than lives up to the accolade in two wonderful comic performances—as a crusty old fool and a blustery old fool. (Roundabout, Broadway at 45th St. 869-8400. Closes March 26.)

Pass the Blutwurst, Bitte—John Kelly reprises his performance piece about the life of the artist Egon Schiele. (La Mama Annex, 66 E. 4th St. 475-7710. Closes March 26.)

Raised in Captivity—Nicky Silver has loaded his new play with hairpin turns in mood and tone—hilarity becomes melancholy in the blink of an eye. The writing has brilliant moments that call to mind the work of Christopher Durang, Amy and David Sedaris, and Craig Lucas. There are terrific performances by Peter Frechette and Patricia Clarkson, as a brother and sister, and by Leslie Ayvazian, who doubles as their dead mother ("I may be dead, but I'm still your mother") and a profoundly deranged therapist. (Vineyard Theatre, 108 E. 15th St. 353-3874. Closes March 19.)

Show Boat—Harold Prince's bighearted production of the 1927 Jerome Kern–Oscar Hammerstein II musical is epic-size, full of life and full of vision. With John McMartin and Elaine Stritch as the patriarch and the matriarch of the floating theatre, and Lonette McKee, whose moving rendition of "Bill" is the show's most intimate moment. (10/17/94) (Gershwin, 51st St. west of Broadway. 307-4100.)

Smokey Joe's Café—The Songs of Leiber and Stoller—The early days of rock and roll are celebrated in a musical revue in which you can expect to hear "Hound Dog," "Jailhouse Rock," "Stand by Me," "Kansas City," and more. (Virginia, 245 W. 52nd St. 239-6200.)

Sunset Boulevard—Glenn Close—who has taken the monumental role of Norma Desmond and made it something all her own, in Andrew Lloyd Webber's homage to Billy Wilder and Charles Brackett's 1950 fable of Hollywood corruption and dementia—is on vacation; she returns to the show on March 21. Karen Mason is filling in. (12/5/94) (Minskoff, 45th St. west of Broadway. 307-4007.)

Swingtime Canteen—A forties musical revue, with an all-female cast, including Alison Fraser and Emily Loesser. (Blue Angel, 321 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

That's Life!—A seriocomic revue about the variety of Jewish life in America. (Theatre East, 211 E. 60th St. 838-9090.)

Uncle Bob—George Morfogen and Adam Stein star in a new play by Austin Pendleton. (Mint Theatre Company, 311 W. 43rd St., fifth floor. 315-9434.)

Uncle Vanya—Disillusion, dissolution, and delusion, done up in a mishmash of accents and performance styles. Tom Courtenay's Vanya is the biggest disappointment: every day, thousands of acres of trees are cut down to replace the scenery he chews every night as he staggers and weaves around the stage. With Werner Klemperer, Amanda Donohoe, and the always appealing James Fox. (Circle in the Square, 50th St. west of Broadway. 239-6200. Closes March 19.)

Vita & Virginia—Eileen Atkins' Virginia Woolf shares the stage with Vanessa Redgrave's Vita Sackville-West in a play that Atkins put together from the letters that the women exchanged during their eighteen-year friendship. Redgrave is imposing and glamorous, but the brilliance of Woolf's writing stacks the theatrical deck in Atkins' favor, and she gives a quietly sensational, riveting performance. Zoe Caldwell directed. (12/12/94) (Union Square Theatre, 100 E. 17th St. 307-4100. Closes March 19.)

LONG RUNS

ALL IN THE TIMING: John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 239-6200. . . . **BEAUTY AND THE BEAST:** Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 307-4100. . . . **BLOOD BROTHERS:** Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **BLUE MAN GROUP/TUBES:** Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 254-4370. . . . **CATS:** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 239-6200. . . . **CRAZY FOR YOU:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **THE FANTASTICKS:** Sullivan Street Playhouse, 181 Sullivan St., at Bleecker St. 674-3838. . . . **GREASE!:** Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 239-6200. . . . **AN INSPECTOR CALLS:** Royale, 242 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **JACKIE MASON: POLITICALLY INCORRECT:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **KISS OF THE SPIDER WOMAN:** Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **LES MISÉRABLES:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **MISS SAIGON:** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 239-6200. . . . **PERFECT CRIME:** Duffy, 1553 Broadway, at 46th St. 695-3401. . . . **THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA:** Majestic, 245 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **STOMP:** Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at 8th St. 477-2477. . . . **THREE TALL WOMEN:** Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 239-6200. . . . **TONY N' TINA'S WEDDING:** St. John's Church, 81 Christopher St. 279-4200. . . . **THE WHO'S TOMMY:** St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 239-6200.

DANCE

"Prodigal" Returns

IN dance, genealogy counts: it isn't just the role that matters, but also the roots. As Arthur Mitchell says, "You always want to go back to the source." Mitchell, the artistic director of the Dance Theatre of Harlem, has George Balanchine on his mind these days: D.T.H. is dancing his "Prodigal Son" in its current season at the Brooklyn Academy of Music.

Mitchell used to dance for Balanchine at the New York City Ballet, and he has invited his longtime friend and sometime N.Y.C.B. partner, Suzanne Farrell, to coach the four ballerinas who will be taking on the role of the Siren. (Felia Doubrovska danced it in the original Ballets Russes production in Paris, in 1929; in her later years, she was Farrell's much loved teacher at the School of American Ballet.) While the Siren isn't the first role you associate with Farrell, she did, in fact, perform it—at her own request, back in 1967, in the halcyon days when Balanchine could refuse her nothing. She danced it again in 1986, in Saratoga, at the end of her career. Mitchell's part in "Prodigal Son" was a smaller one—a brief stint in the corps—but by presenting "Prodigal" with his own company he has come full circle, and more.

EDWIN FOTHERINGHAM

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GIORGIO ARMANI
OCCHIALI

DANCE—Cont'd

Merce Cunningham Dance Company—Final performances of the season. March 15 at 8 and March 18 at 2: "Breakers," "Ground Level Overlay," and "CRWDSPCR." . . . ¶ March 16 at 8 and March 19 at 3: "Inventions," "MinEvent," and "Sounddance." . . . ¶ March 17 at 8: "Rune" and "Enter." . . . ¶ March 18 at 8: "Ground Level Overlay" and "Enter." (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

Dance Theatre of Harlem—March 15 at 8: "The Joplin Dances," "Dialogues," and "A Song for Dead Warriors." . . . ¶ March 16 and 18 at 8 and March 19 at 3: "Toccata e Due Canzoni," "Prodigal Son," and "Firebird." . . . ¶ March 17 at 8 and March 18 at 2: "Designs with Strings," "Othello," "Signs and Wonders," and "The River." . . . ¶ March 21 at 8: "Etosha," "Voluntaries," and "Ginastera." (Brooklyn Academy of Music, 30 Lafayette Ave. 1-718 636-4100. Through March 26.)

Feld Ballets/NY—March 15 at 8: "Aurora II," "Love Song Waltzes," and "Doo Dah Day." . . . ¶ March 16 at 8 and March 19 at 7:30: "Fauna," "Ion," "Over the Pavement," and "Ludwig Gambits" (première) . . . . ¶ March 17 at 8 and March 19 at 2: "ContraPose," "Gnossiennes," and "The Jig Is Up." . . . ¶ March 18 at 2, a family matinée: "Half Time," "Hello Fancy," "The Envelope," and "23 Skidoo." . . . ¶ March 18 at 8: "A Footstep of Air," "Evoe," "Chi," and "Wolfgang Strategies." . . . ¶ March 21 at 8: "Consort," "Kore," "Ogive," and "Doghead & Godcatchers." (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. Through April 9.)

Manhattan Tap and the Hardbop Trio—Seven tap soloists, including Tarik Winston and Germaine Ingram, perform the choreography of Heather Cornell. The Hardbop Trio provides musical support. (Alice Tully Hall. 875-5050. March 18 at 8.)

"Unsafe / Unsuited"—Dancers and performance artists Keith Hennessy, Ishmael Houston-Jones, and Patrick Scully, in what they term a high-risk meditation on the sensual aspects of contact improvisation. (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 477-5288. March 16-19 at 9.)

"Macbeth"—The première of Francis Patrelle's ballet version. With Davis Robertson in the title role and Alan Hineline as Banquo. (Kaye Playhouse, Hunter College, Park Ave. at 68th St. 772-4448. March 16-17 at 8, March 18 at 2 and 8, and March 19 at 3.)

Jimmy Slyde—The good godfather of tap—half of the Slyde Brothers team, which first brought sliding into tap—closes the Brooklyn Conservatory of Music's jazz series. (58 Seventh Ave., Brooklyn. 1-718 622-3300. March 18 at 8.)

Annabella Gonzalez Dance Theatre—As part of the Festival of Mexican Performing Arts, the company performs modern dance to Mexican music. Ms. Gonzalez introduces each work. (Bruno Walter Auditorium, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Lincoln Center. March 18 at 2:30. No tickets necessary.)

NIGHT LIFE

Fired Up

LAUREL WATSON has a taste for red sequinned dresses and slow-burning torch songs, and when she mounts the stage at Match (160 Mercer Street)—which she does every Sunday night—you can hardly believe she's eighty-seven. Over her long career, she's sung with everyone from Count Basie to Duke Ellington, but she's best remembered by jazz aficionados as the sweet voice behind " 'Deed I Do," which the bandleader Don Redman recorded in 1938. She shares the stage at Match with another New York treasure, the Shorty Jackson Legacy Blues Band, named after the late, great pianist by night and mortician by day (at Patterson's Funeral Home, in Harlem), who in the eighties wooed the beautiful people at Nell's and Odeon. At 8, the band begins to play. Toward the back of the stage—an elevated metal loft that looks like a high-tech loading dock—George Kelly lets loose on the tenor sax. (He's the last surviving member of the celebrated Savoy Sultans, the band that ruled the Savoy Ballroom in the thirties and forties.) Around 9, Ms. Watson struts to the microphone, snaps her fingers, and, with a killer smile, tells the audience, "Sit down and shut up." And everyone obliges, because Ms. Watson gets what she wants.

CONCERTS

Highlights in Jazz: Salute to Buddy DeFranco—With a fluency and virtuosity that enabled him to run with the big boys, Buddy DeFranco kept the clarinet out of the dustbin during the salad days of bebop; he hasn't slowed down yet. Among the performers will be the ubiquitous Billy Taylor, Earl May, Terry Gibbs (DeFranco's equally eloquent vibist), and the man himself. (Pace Downtown Theatre, Spruce St. between Nassau and Gold Sts. 346-1715. March 16 at 8.)

Thomas Buckner—The baritone contemporary-music champion sings pieces by David Behrman and Donald Knaack. (Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. 355-6160. March 16 at 8.)

Joe Cocker—With Keb' Mo'. (Beacon Theatre, Broadway at 74th St. 496-7070. March 16 at 8.)

Jimmy Heath—The jazz saxophonist. (New School, 66 W. 12th St. 229-5690. March 17 at 6.)

Sheryl Crow—As a backup singer, Crow was the woman behind men like Michael Jackson, George Harrison, and Don Henley. Last year, she declared her independence with "Tuesday Night Music Club," a smart, safe album, and cleaned up at the Grammys. Opening for Crow will be Freedy Jackson, a singer-songwriter from Kansas who writes haunting country-punk songs of the sort generally ignored at the Grammys. (Beacon Theatre. March 17 at 8.)

The Chieftains—With Marianne Faithfull, on St. Patrick's Day. (Avery Fisher Hall. 875-5030. March 17 at 8.)

Phil Coulter—The Irish singer. (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. March 17 at 8.)

Terry Allen and Jo Harvey Allen—The West Texas husband-and-wife team in an evening of storytelling and songs. (St. Ann's Church, 157 Montague St., Brooklyn. 1-718 858-2424. March 17-18 at 8.)

Sarah McLachlan—Though she's just in her twenties, McLachlan is a throwback to the days when female singers weren't expected to cuss like truck drivers. Her wistful techno-folk may be more earnest than exciting, but her ghostly voice and her thoughtful delivery are never-fail charms. With Paula Cole. (Radio City Music Hall, Sixth Ave. at 50th St. 247-4777. March 18 at 8.)

Drummers of Burundi—Watching seventeen robed men pound on hollowed tree trunks might not seem like everyone's idea of fun, but the Drummers' remarkable polyrhythms and acrobatic dancing make for an awe-inspiring evening. With Senegalese drummer Mor Thiam. (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. 840-2824. March 18 at 8.)

The Black Crowes—For a while they were a younger, feistier version of the Rolling Stones, but these days the Stones impersonate the Stones better than the Black Crowes do. Still, Chris Robinson's gnarled tenor and the band's razor-sharp rhythm section are forces to be reckoned with. With the Dirty Dozen Brass Band. (Beacon Theatre. March 18-22 at 8.)

Tom Petty & the Heartbreakers—The bespectacled Floridian has moved gracefully from power-pop punkiness to a relaxed, folk-inflected mid-life manner. He returns with new solo material (from the recently released "Wildflowers"), a Traveling Wilburys tune or two, and his huge sack of hits. With Pete Droge. (Madison Square Garden. 465-6000. March 20 at 8.)

Vince Gill—With Patty Loveless, in a good ol' country concert. (Paramount, Madison Square Garden. 465-6000. March 21 at 8.)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

(A highly arbitrary listing, in which boldface type indicates some of the more notable performers in town. Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it is advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.)

Algonquin Hotel, 59 W. 44th St. (840-6800)—In the Oak Room, pianist-vocalist **PETER HOWARD** salutes the great Broadway musicals. Dining.

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The Shorty Jackson Legacy Blues Band, at Match.

MAX MILLER

Arthur's Tavern, 57 Grove St. (675-6879)—Mondays belong to the Grove Street Stompers, Tuesdays through Thursdays to Al Bundy and Johnny Parker, Fridays and Saturdays to the Freddy Francis trio, and Sundays to Lee Lorenz and the Creole Cookin' Jazz Band.

Birdland, 2745 Broadway, at 105th St. (749-2228)—March 17-18: The MICHAEL RAYE quartet. Dining.

Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—This blue-on-blue club is an institution and knows it: how many other clubs sell their own belt buckles? Through March 19: the ZAWINUL SYNDICATE and BILL EVANS & PUSH. Keyboardist and composer Joe Zawinul is best remembered for his work with the fusion group Weather Report, but his illustrious résumé includes forays with Cannonball Adderley and Miles Davis. Evans' saxophone added a needed jolt to Miles Davis's early-eighties comeback. The JAMES MOODY quartet and the AL GREY ALL-STARS begin a weeklong run on March 21. Dining.

Bradley's, 70 University Pl., at 11th St. (228-6440)—A duskily lit neighborhood bar, where pianists, bassists, and, occasionally, drummers compete for your ear. Truth and beauty usually prevail. Through March 18: the JONNY KING trio. Dining.

Cajun, 129 Eighth Ave., at 16th St. (691-6174)—A New Orleans-style restaurant specializing in Dixieland and swing. On Fridays, catch the Canal Street Dixieland Jazz and Blues band. Saturdays belong to the New Atlantic Jazz band.

Carlyle Hotel, Madison Ave. at 76th St. (744-1600)—The Café Carlyle, a snug, windowless enclave in the doorman district, features discreet waiters and wraparound pastel murals. At the moment, BARBARA COOK is the main attraction in this urbane dinner-and-music room. Her voice remains almost defiantly that of the nineteen-fifties Broadway ingénue, and her material, particularly her homage to Mabel Mercer, is as supple as a fresh corsage. She is backed by her long-time pianist and arranger WALLY HARPER. . . . ¶ Across the hall, in Bemelmans Bar, the suave and sybaritic RONNY WHYTE is in attendance.

Fat Tuesday's, 190 Third Ave., at 17th St. (533-7900)—Through March 19: vocalist CAROL SLOANE. On Mondays, guitarist-inventor LES PAUL leads a trio. Dining.

Fifty Seven Fifty Seven, 57 E. 57th St. (758-5757)—A sleek piano-and-bass room in the Four Seasons Hotel. Thursdays through Sundays, DONALD JOHNSTON is the featured pianist; on weekends he performs with a trio. Dining.

Iridium, 44 W. 63rd St. (582-2121)—Through March 18: The club celebrates its first anniversary with a weeklong run by drummer ROY HAYNES (who'll be celebrating his seventieth birthday). Having played with Lester Young, Charlie Parker, and John Coltrane, Haynes could easily afford to rest on his laurels. Instead, he has taken an active role as elder statesman, nurturing new talent and handing down the secrets of leading a small, airtight group. With the recent death of Art Taylor, he's now one of the few remaining classic bop drummers. Pianist CYRUS CHESTNUT takes over on March 21. Monday nights belong to FIVE GUITARS PLAY MINGUS. Dining.

Knickerbocker, 33 University Pl., at 9th St. (228-8490)—An Old New York kind of place, with dark wood panelling, white tablecloths, and brass figurine lamps. March 15-18: Piano and bass with PIERRE HUREL and DAN GREENSPAN. Dining.

Knitting Factory, 74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—March 15: PAUL MOTIAN. Plugged or unplugged, Motian is a drummer with a knack for assembling quirky and fascinating combos that explore the jazz tradition from a decidedly unexpected perspective. This performance is with his electric bebop band. March 16: Duets with YAMATSUKE EYE and JOHN ZORN. March 17-18: MEDESKI, MARTIN AND WOOD and VERNON REID'S MASQUE. Driven by John Medeski's Hammond organ, this trio plays churning bebop. They know their funk, but they're not averse to a little harmonic sophistication. Now that Living Colour is history, guitarist Reid is indulging his avant tendencies. Masque is a jazzy hip-hop collective complete with a d.j. March 19: The Knit's Loud Music/Silent Film series continues with "Phantom of the Opera," featuring live accompaniment by ALAN CHASE. March 20: The DAVID MURRAY big band. His thunder may have been stolen by the neocon explosion, but Murray, the great hope of the eighties, is still a contender, and still capable of toppling buildings with his galvanic tenor sax.

Match, 160 Mercer St. (343-0020)—Sundays belong to the SHORTY JACKSON LEGACY BLUES BAND, featuring LAUREL WATSON. Dining.

Metropolis, 31 Union Sq. W. (675-2300)—A swank basement club, home to high-profile jazz combos. March 17-19: Latin percussionist MONGO SANTAMARIA. Tuesdays are given over to the GEORGE GEE ORCHESTRA, a seventeen-piece swing band.

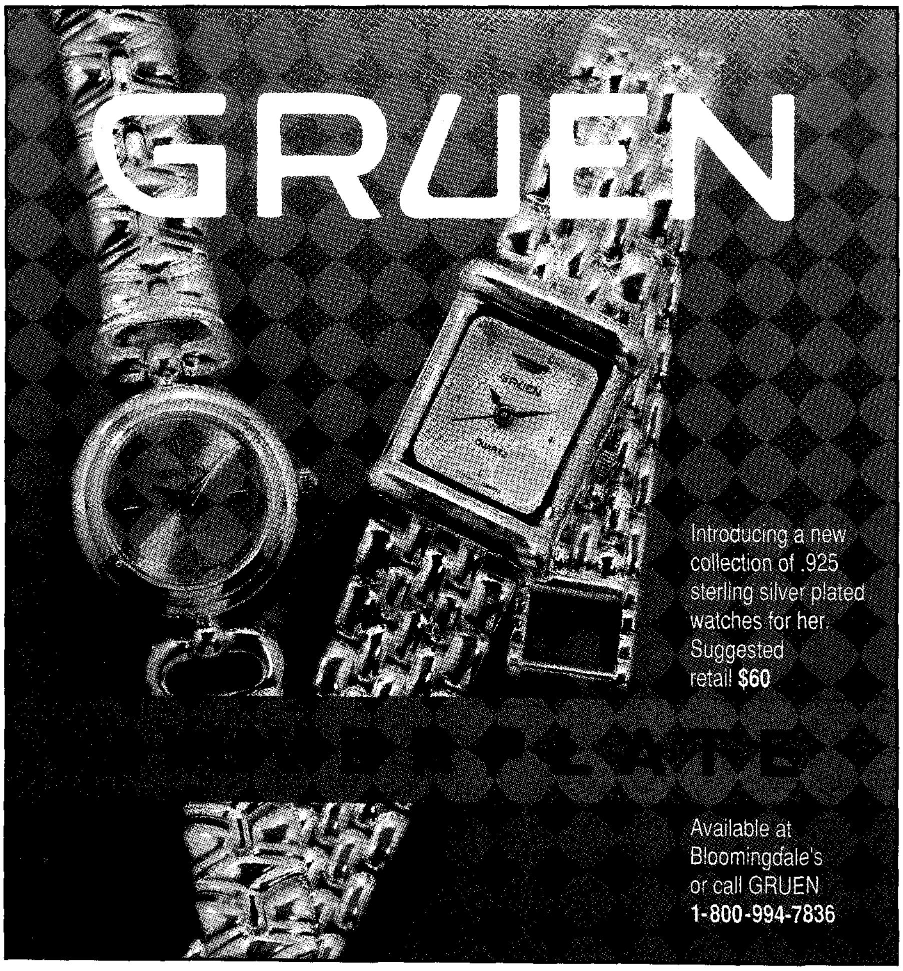
Michael's Pub, 211 E. 55th St. (758-2272)—Tuesdays through Saturdays, "You Keep Coming Back Like a Song," an Irving Berlin revue. On Mondays, Woody Allen continues his night job as clarinet player in the NEW ORLEANS FUNERAL AND RAGTIME ORCHESTRA, a Dixieland-jazz ensemble. Closed Sundays.

Rainbow & Stars, 30 Rockefeller Plaza (632-5000)—The great cabaret in the sky. LESLIE UGGAMS is the diva-in-residence. . . . ¶ Across the hall, in the Rainbow Room, there's a revolving dance floor, plus swinging big-band music courtesy of the Rainbow Room Orchestra, featuring vocalists Michael Andrew and Claudette Sierra. Closed Mondays.

Red Blazer Too, 349 W. 46th St. (262-3112)—Thursdays belong to Stan Rubin's big band and Phoebe Légère; Fridays to Lew Anderson's big band and Sam Ulano and the Bourbon Street Swingers; and Saturdays to Bob Cantwell and his Stompers.

Russian Tea Room, 150 W. 57th St. (265-0947)—Borscht, blini, and other thing to make the heart beat faster. The JUDY BARNETT quartet entertains on March 20, with FRANK VIGNOLA.

Tavern on the Green, Central Park W. at 67th St. (873-3200)—The Chestnut Room may resemble a hunting lodge decorated by Liberace, but the performances here are no joke. The second half of March belongs to singer NANCY LA MOTT. Dining.



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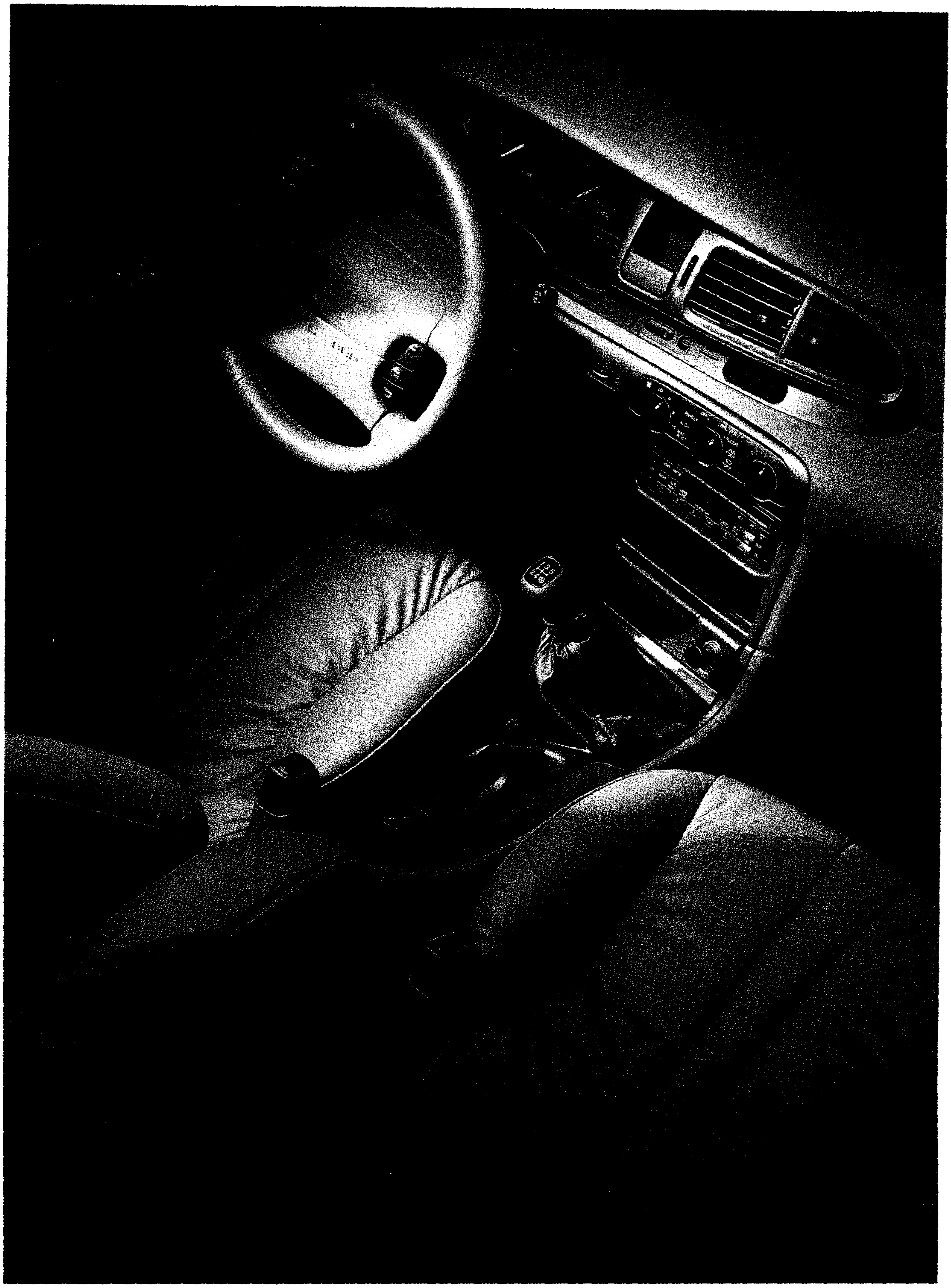

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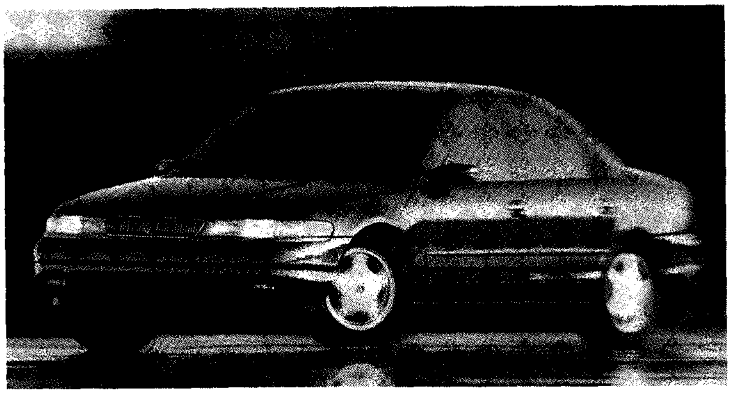

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MERCURY

NIGHT LIFE–Cont'd

Village Vanguard, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—The young trumpet virtuoso **NICHOLAS PAYTON,** in through March 19, hasn't quite found his own voice yet, but with influences that include everyone from King Oliver to Lee Morgan, he knows enough jazz history to cure any identity crisis. That he resembles Louis Armstrong circa 1923 doesn't hurt either. The **VANGUARD JAZZ ORCHESTRA** holds sway on Mondays.

Visiones, 125 Macdougal St., at W. 3rd St. (673-5576)—March 15-18: The **ABRAHAM BURTON** quartet. Burton's a robust stylist who combines Jackie McLean's verve with Pete Brown's bluesy rigor. March 21: The **MICHAEL BOCIAN** quartet. Dining.

Zinno, 126 W. 13th St. (924-5182)—A rarity among jazz clubs: somewhere you'd go to eat even if there were no music. Through March 18: **JANE JARVIS,** a pleasing mainstream pianist, holds court with the expert swing bassist **FRANK TATE.**

ROCK, ETC.

Blarney Star, 43 Murray St. (732-2873)—Home to fine Irish music every Friday night. March 17: An evening of fiddle, button accordion, and guitar with **BRIAN CONWAY, JOHN NOLAN,** and **DON MEAD.**

Bottom Line, 15 W. 4th St., at Mercer St. (228-6300)—March 17: **OREGON.** Exotica is their raison d'être, but there's enough real musicianship in this band to keep them out of the New Age bins. Acoustic guitarist Ralph Towner, in particular, can dazzle.

Brownies, 169 Avenue A, at 10th St. (429-8392)—Spoken-word sensation **MAGGIE ESTEP** is in on March 16. March 17: Hardcore with **MURPHY'S LAW.**

CBGB & OMFUG, 315 Bowery, at Bleecker St. (982-4052)—A narrow, graffiti-strewn cave packed every evening with new and used bands. March 15: **BONEBOX.** . . . ¶ Next door, on March 18, the neat and comfortable testament to gentrification called CB's Gallery presents **YURI NAUMOV,** the Russian guitarist.

Chicago B.L.U.E.S., 73 Eighth Ave., at 13th St. (924-9755)—March 17-18: Blues, Houston-style, with **GUITAR SHORTY.**

The Cooler, 416 W. 14th St. (229-0785)—A lavender and stainless-steel pit deep in the heart of the meat district. March 17: **SLANT 6** and **BLONDE REDHEAD.** March 18: Ska with the **SCOFFLAWS.** Monday nights are free, with guest curators. Wednesday nights are given over to experimental d.j. spinoffs.

Fez, 380 Lafayette St. (533-7000)—March 17: The **BLACK ROCK COALITION.** March 18: A night of vintage Ernie Kovacs music videos. March 20: "The Honeysuckles," a weekly live soap opera. March 21: Singer **FRANCIS DUNNERY** continues her Tuesday-night residency. The **MINGUS BIG BAND** still packs them in every Thursday. Dining.

Flannery's, 205 W. 14th St. (929-9589)—A well-scrubbed, amiable Irish pub with many of the classic features (pints of Guinness, nonstop TV sports) and a few of the near-classics (a CD jukebox, a portrait of Elvis).

Irving Plaza, 17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (777-6800)—This sprawling two-floor establishment has been all things to all people: meeting hall, rock club, jazz club, Off Broadway theatre. On Sunday nights, the Swing Dance Society pays homage to the Lindy Hop, a dance that involves a lot of whirling and the occasional display of underwear. Sets from eight until midnight. For information on the society, call 696-9737.

Kaptain Banana, 101 Greene St. (343-9000)—French cabaret *en travesti* in SoHo. Three drag queens and eight dancers re-create the Court of Versailles, a carnival in Rio, Marlene Dietrich, and the Andrews Sisters. There's also a singing gorilla. Dining.

Maxwell's, 1039 Washington St., Hoboken (1-201 798-4064)—Many of the bands that play here today will be playing somewhere more expensive tomorrow. March 17: The **HUMPHRIES.**

Mercury Lounge, 217 E. Houston St. (260-4700)—March 17: Singer-songwriter **PIERCE TURNER.** March 19: **JUICY.**

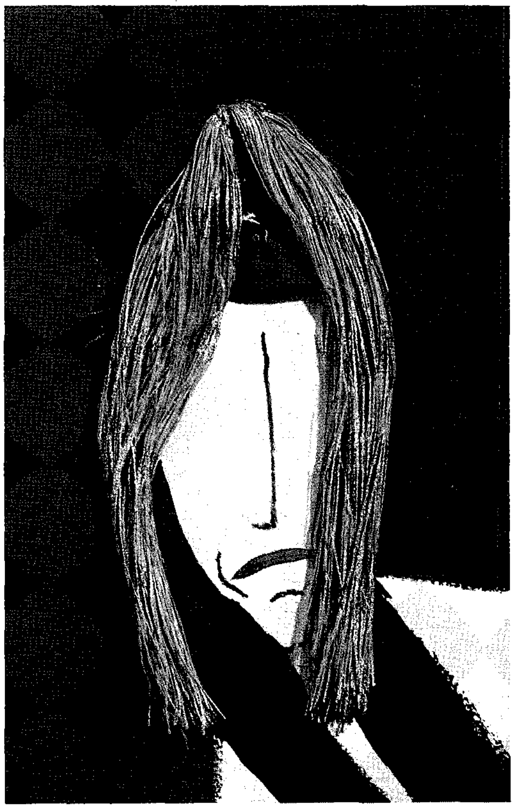
Nell's, 246 W. 14th St. (675-1567)—A Victorian-style club, home to an eclectic crowd of downtown youngsters dancing to throbbing funk and techno-pop. Monday night is Funky Buddha, with live bands and d.j. Derek Corley "on the wheels."

S.O.B.'s, 204 Varick St., at W. Houston St. (243-4940)—**ASTRUD GILBERTO** bossa novas in for three nights on March 21. Tuesday nights, S.O.B.'s presents Soul Kitchen, an evening of seventies funk and R. & B. for devotees of Don Cornelius. Thursday nights belong to Giant Step, a roving collective of musicians, rappers, and d.j.s who mix jazz, funk, and hip-hop. Dining.

Tramps, 51 W. 21st St. (727-7788)—March 16: A very special appearance by **THE FAMILY STAND.** Their music was an emotional blast of funk, rock, and soul that featured smart lyrics, precise architecture, and three heaven-sent vocalists. Easy to love but apparently hard to market, the band split up three years ago. Their high-spirited club dates were awe-inspiring; this one-off reprise has the makings of legend. Opening are the **RIGHT REVEREND DADDY LOVE AND THE DISCIPLES,** featuring former Living Colour vocalist **COREY GLOVER. KIRSTY MAC COLL** performs on March 18. MacColl is one of the first (and best) of the baby-voiced British singers. Back in 1989, her cherubic version of Billy Bragg's "A New England" became a minor hit, with a little help from her knob-twirler husband, Steve Lillywhite.

Webster Hall, 125 E. 11th St. (353-1600)—A byzantine disco wonderland with four floors, a coffee shop, and a wig boutique. Wednesday is drag night. Psychedelic Thursdays feature grunge acts and cheap beer.

Wetlands, 161 Hudson St. (966-4225)—March 17: **MOON BOOT LOVER.** March 22: **GODS AND MONSTERS.**



Tom Petty, at Madison Square Garden.

HANOCH PIVEN

ART

Sentimental Journeys

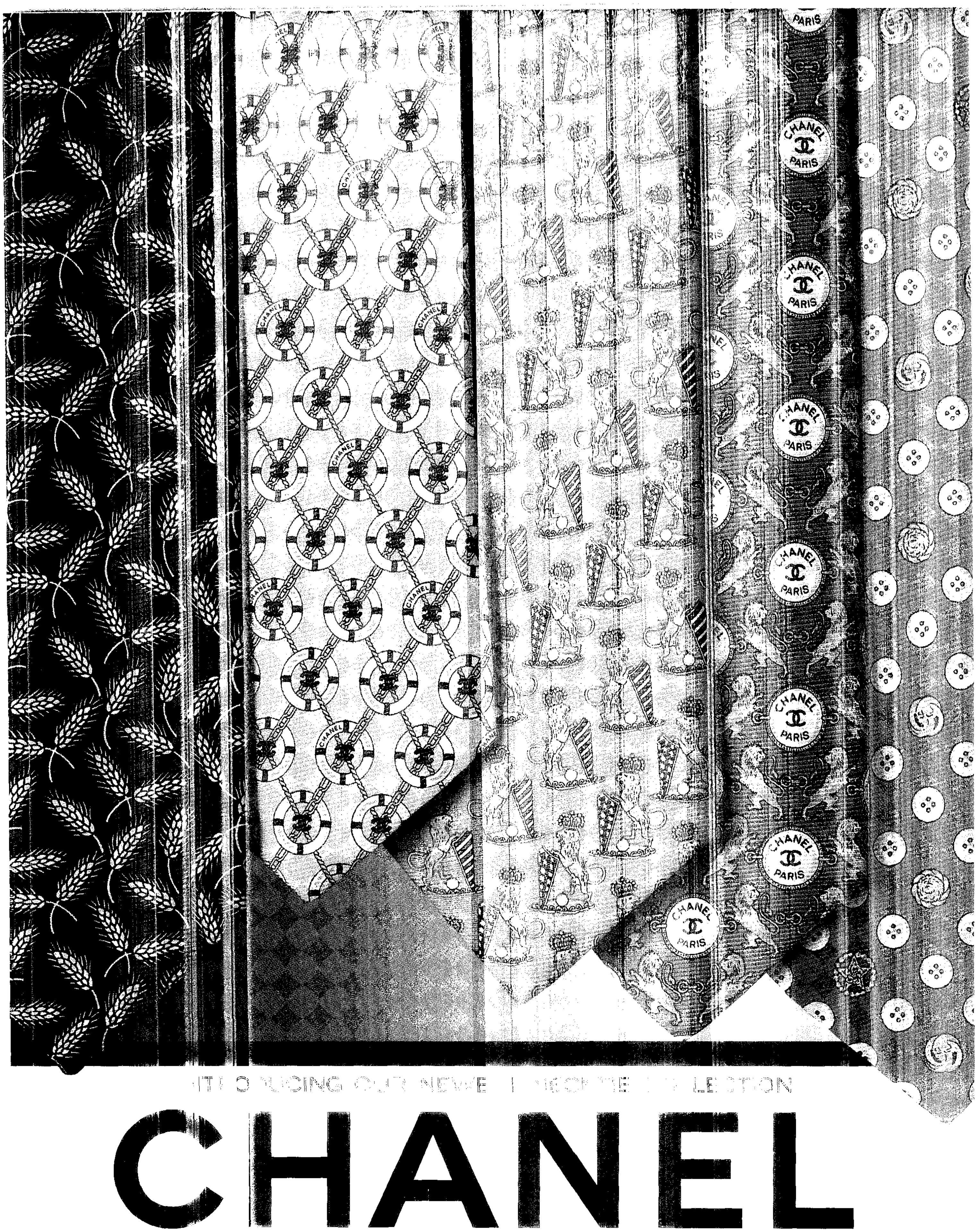
CALLING the Guggenheim the AIDS museum may be crass, but at the moment it's also fairly accurate. Two new exhibitions there—a big Ross Bleckner retrospective and a smaller show by Felix Gonzalez-Torres—are both, by and large, about AIDS. Bleckner treats us to liberal helpings of his familiar stew of sublimity and kitsch, much of it sickly gorgeous—the work of a soul profoundly divided between the raptures of a mystic and the whimsies of an interior decorator. "God Won't Come," proclaims one of his titles, in what seems to be a declaration of resignation—but the words betray a religious longing, too.

In Gonzalez-Torres's work, God is absent, dead, or irrelevant. The Cuban-born neo-Conceptualist supplements his typically sparse or abstract imagery (stacks of paper, sometimes bearing cryptic messages; spills of hard candies and of bubble gum) with parenthetical subtitles that allude to AIDS, politics, and more personal themes. He borrows freely from minimalist and Conceptualist modes of presentation, which makes for an austere, even pseudoscientific look, but his work can be as sentimental as Bleckner's. In "Untitled (Perfect Lovers)," the artist pairs two synchronized, battery-operated wall clocks (perfect lovers are always in synch). The piece has a dark side, too, though—it's a memento mori. Batteries eventually die.

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 82nd St.—"R. B. Kitaj," a retrospective of more than seventy paintings by the expatriate artist who for nearly four decades has lived and worked in London. Through May 14. . . . ¶ "I Tell My Heart: The Art of Horace Pippin." A selection of paintings by a self-taught black artist from Pennsylvania (1888-1946). Works by Jacob Lawrence, Bill Traylor, John Kane, Grandma Moses, and Arnold Friedman are also on view. . . . ¶ "The French Renaissance in Prints from the Bibliothèque Nationale de France." Through March 19. . . . ¶ Some eighty examples of the creative confluence of Eastern and Western styles are on view in "Orientalism: Visions of the East in Western Dress." From eighteenth-century court gowns to the recent inspirations of Issey Miyake and Romeo Gigli, luxury and fantasy are the leitmotivs. Through March 19. . . . ¶ "Greek Gold." Forget embarrassment—this is a *humiliation* of riches, as splendid an exhibition of Classical jewelry as we're ever likely to see. The workmanship throughout is so delicate that you may want to bring a magnifying glass. Through March 26. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:15, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53rd St.—A retrospective of video installations, sculptural objects, walk-in environments, and sound pieces by Bruce Nauman. Through May 23. . . . ¶ "Kandinsky: Compositions." Wassily Kandinsky, the Russian painter who invented abstractionism, groped his way there with gingerly care, marking the milestones in his evolution with a numbered series of large-scale "Compositions." In this



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CHANEL

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SAN FRANCISCO, PALM BEACH, BAL HARBOUR, HONOLULU, ASPEN, WASHINGTON, D.C.

For information on CHANEL, please call 800-550-0005 quiet little blockbuster exhibition, the museum has united the seven surviving canvases for the first time. Enhanced by preliminary studies and by photographs of the lost works, the exhibit documents the progress of Kandinsky's expanding vision with elegance and precision. Through April 25. . . . ¶ A selection of drawings from the sixties by such sculptors as Eva Hesse, Robert Smithson, Dan Flavin, Kenneth Snelson, and Sol LeWitt. . . . ¶ "Max Beckmann Prints" includes lithographs, drypoints, and woodcuts from throughout the German Expressionist's career. . . . ¶ Recent photographic acquisitions are on view, including works by Rudy Burckhardt, Hans Bellmer, Jan Groover, Gilles Peress, and Mariana Yampolsky. Through April 11. . . . ¶ The Architecture and Design galleries have a new installation of tools, furniture, appliances, and cars. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, 11 to 6; Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 8:30.)

Guggenheim Museum, Fifth Ave. at 89th St.—A mid-career retrospective of seventy paintings by Ross Bleckner. Through May 14. . . . ¶ Ten years of work by Felix Gonzalez-Torres. Through May 10. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 10 to 6, and Fridays and Saturdays, 10 to 8.)

Guggenheim Museum SoHo, 575 Broadway—Fifty-six paintings by Antoni Tàpies, in a retrospective of the Catalan artist's career. Through April 23. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Saturday evenings until 8.)

Whitney Museum of American Art, Madison Ave. at 75th St.—The 1995 Biennial opens over the next week. The works on the fourth floor can be seen first, starting March 15; the third floor opens March 18; and the second floor opens March 23. (Open Wednesdays, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6; Thursdays, 1 to 8.)

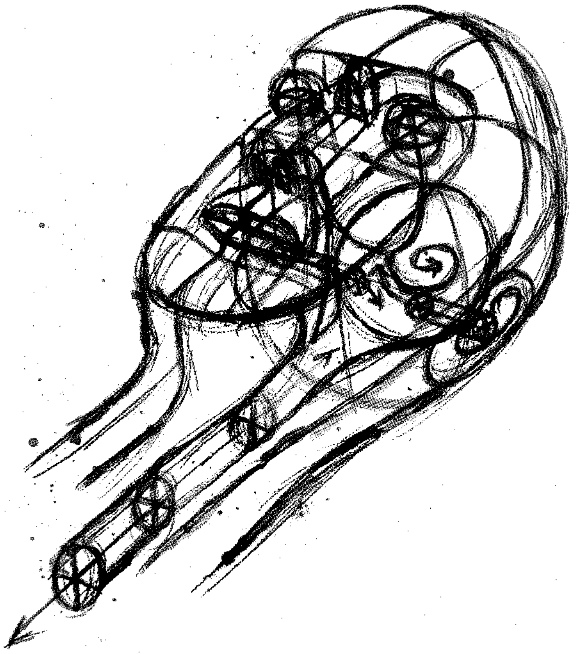
Brooklyn Museum, Eastern Parkway—The greatly expanded African galleries have reopened, and they now contain more than two hundred and fifty works. . . . ¶ Two other displays are new: the Arts of the Pacific gallery, showing works from Melanesia, and the Arts of the Andes, on view in the Great Hall. . . . ¶ "Thomas Cole: Landscape into History" presents arcadian and allegorical visions of New World wilderness by the English-born founder of the Hudson River school. Through April 2. . . . ¶ "Grand Reserves" gives museumgoers a chance to see eleven recently restored and reframed paintings from the museum's storerooms, including works by William Merritt Chase, Louis Remy Mignot, Arthur B. Davies, and others. Through March 26. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 10 to 5.)

Asia Society, Park Ave. at 70th St.—"New Finds, Old Treasures." Eighty examples of Chinese ceramics, including two jars from a previously unknown Neolithic culture (circa 2000 B.C.). Through June 18. . . . ¶ "Indian and Southeast Asian Art," a display of rare paintings, ceramics, and bronzes from the Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection. Through March 26. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 11 to 6, and Thursday evenings until 8; Sundays, noon to 5.)

Frick Collection, 1 E. 70th St.—"Romantics, Neoclassicists, Realists: European Drawings from the Stanford University Museum of Art" includes works from the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by Fragonard, Turner, Delacroix, and others. Through May 14. (Open daily, except Mondays, 10 to 6; Sundays, 1 to 6.)

Museum of American Folk Art, Columbus Ave. at 65th St.—The art of Minnie Evans (1892-1987), often inspired by dreams and religious visions, is on view in an exhibit of more than sixty paintings. Through April 2. . . . ¶ "The Gift Is Small, The Love Is Great," a show of Pennsylvania German gift frakturs (illuminated documents). Through April 2. (Open daily, except Mondays, 11:30 to 7:30.)

National Academy of Design, Fifth Ave. at 89th St.—The Academy's hundred-and-seventieth annual exhibition includes works by Paul Cadmus, Jacob Lawrence, Rosemarie Beck, and Marianna Pineda. Through April 2. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, noon to 5; Friday evenings until 8, with no admission charge after 5.)



Self-portrait by Tom Otterness (Brooke Alexander).

The New Museum, 583 Broadway—Fifty large-scale photographs by Andres Serrano, including examples from all of his thematic series since 1983. Through April 9. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, noon to 6, and Saturdays until 8.)

New York Public Library, Fifth Ave. at 42nd St.—All forty of Lawrence Weiner's artist books, along with posters, matchbooks, plates, and other objects, are gathered in the peculiarly titled "Learn to Read Art The Books: Lawrence Weiner." Through April 8. . . . ¶ An exhibition on the works of the French fabulist Jean de La Fontaine (1621-95) is in the Solomon Room. Seventeenth-century music sets the tone for the display of rare books, drawings, scores, and other objects. Through April 15. . . . ¶ "e.e. cummings @ 100: An Anniversary Exhibition." (Open Mondays, and Thursdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6; Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 11 to 6.)

Queens Museum of Art, Flushing Meadow Park—"Common Ground/Uncommon Vision," a broad selection of American folk art from the Michael and Julie Hall Collection, including paintings, sculptures, drawings, and religious carvings, along with toys, walking sticks, and other functional objects. Through April 9. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5; Saturdays and Sundays, noon to 5. . . . **Note:** A concurrent show of work from the same collection is at the PaineWebber Building, Sixth Ave. at 52nd St., through April 14. Open Mondays through Fridays, 8 to 6.)

Studio Museum in Harlem, 144 W. 125th St.—Forty-seven paintings and works on paper by Emma Amos. Through March 19. . . . ¶ "Sam Gilliam: Recent Monoprints." Through May 14. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5; Saturdays and Sundays, 1 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

(Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6. The following lists lead off with new shows.)

Guiseppe Penone / Dan Graham—A wall drawing, and sculptures using trees indigenous to the forests around Turin. / An installation titled "Opposing Mirrors and Video Monitors on Time Delay" (1974). Opens March 15. Through April 22. (Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. Open Mondays.)

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Joe Andoe—Paintings that look like antique sepia-toned photographs, containing landscape and horse imagery. Through April 15. (Blum Helman, 20 W. 57th St.)

Polly Apfelbaum—Wall works and drawings that incorporate bedsheets, pieces of dyed fabric, and fragments of photographs. Through April 22. (Hirschl & Adler Modern, 21 E. 70th St.)

Lillian Ball—Large-scale sculptures in black and red foam rubber. Through March 25. (Sculpture Center, 167 E. 69th St.)

John Bowman—Imagined aerial and close-up views of cities, inspired by the artist's recent travels in Central Europe. Through April 1. (De Nagy, 41 W. 57th St.)

Stanley Boxer—Small paintings and works on paper. Through April 1. (Long, 24 W. 57th St. Open Mondays.)

Earl Cunningham (1893-1977) / **Grandma Moses** (1860-1961)—A pairing of work by two folk painters who were stylistic soulmates but whose careers and creative visions could not have been more different. Through March 18. (Galerie St. Etienne, 24 W. 57th St.)

Lesley Dill—Figurative sculptures in paper, copper, wire, and wood, along with manipulated black-and-white photographs of human figures. Through March 18. (Frumkin-Adams, 50 W. 57th St.)

Jane Freilicher—Recent New York City and Long Island landscapes, many of them populated with orchids, parrots, and lute players. Through April 1. (Fischbach, 24 W. 57th St.)

Jacob El Hanani—At first glance, these ink drawings appear to be neat squares of even gray tone. A closer look reveals zillions of tiny pen strokes: triangles, circles, cross hatchings, even the Hebrew alphabet, written over and over. You can't help but admire the compulsive skill, but bring your glasses. Through April 1. (Yoshii, 20 W. 57th St.)

Wolf Kahn—Recent landscapes, familiar enough, but vibrantly rendered in an unusual, bright palette. Through April 5. (Borgenicht, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St.)

Robert Kushner—"Mille Fleurs," new paintings of flowers, fruits, and vegetables by one of the artists of the pattern-and-decoration movement. In the early seventies, Kushner achieved some notoriety for performance pieces in which the performers were garbed in vestments made entirely of food, which the audience ultimately ate. Since then, he has labored on luxuriant paintings that flagrantly transgress the proprieties of the reductivist style that prevailed when he was coming of age. Many of these new works are quite beautiful, but they're also frankly and unapologetically a little tacky. Through April 8. (Midtown-Payson, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St.)

Morris Louis (1912-62)—Six large, splendid acrylic-stained canvases from 1960 (four of them from the famous "Unfurled" series) by the color-field abstractionist. Clement Greenberg believed that the future of art was with paintings like these. He was wrong, but he certainly knew a good thing when he saw it. Through March 18. (Emmerich, 41 E. 57th St.)

Agnes Martin—Recent work. Martin's career is an invaluable corrective to those who regard minimalism as the preserve of crochety old men. Her pale stripe paintings may seem low-impact initially, but they reward sustained contemplation. Through March 18. (Pace Wildenstein, 32 E. 57th St.)

George Negroponte—Abstract paintings with mainly vertical brushstrokes surrounded by solid fields of dark blues and ochres. Through April 22. (McCoy, 41 E. 57th St. Open Mondays.)

Elizabeth Newman—Constructions that project a strangely fuzzy, feel-good Surrealism tinged with a happy feminism. A prayer bench flanked with pairs of worn white baby shoes filters girlhood through a Proustian gauze. A pair of assemblages, called beds, amount to the 57th Street version of sugar and spice versus snips and snails: the female one has rubber nipples protruding through stretched blue silk and spraying raffia; the male one has dog biscuits. Through March 18. (Galerie Lelong, 20 W. 57th St.)

Peter Poskas—The clapboard buildings, wild grasses, and hard light of Monhegan Island, Maine, appear in this realist's new paintings. Through April 1. (Schmidt Bingham, 41 E. 57th St.)

Martin Puryear—Four large wood sculptures and one large tar-and-mesh piece. Through April 15. (McKee, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St.)

Donald Sultan—Brand-new paintings, ranging from one to eight feet square, of dominoes, butterflies, fruits, and flowers. Through April 1. (Knoedler, 19 E. 70th St.)

"Conspiratorial Laughter"—The friendship of Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray is among the most famous in the history of art, and this well-chosen exhibition comprises many of their best collaborations. More than a dozen of Ray's portraits of Duchamp are on view, including a hilarious shot of the great man wearing a headdress of Turkish coins (purportedly for his initiation into a society devoted to the memory of Alfred Jarry). There is also a photograph of the two artists by Cartier-Bresson. Through April 15. (Zabriskie, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St.)

"Elementum"—All four *elementa*, actually, in paintings by Jennifer Bartlett, Howard Hodgkin, April Gornik, Michelle Stuart, and others. Through April 1. (Ryan, 24 W. 57th St.)

"Neo-Dada: Redefining Art, 1958-62"—An admirable attempt to fit under one handy rubric works of art that have been variously described as Fluxus, New Realism, Happenings, and proto-Pop. Fifty-eight works, by Arman, Allan Kaprow, Yves Klein, Jean Tinguely, and others are on view. Through March 18. (Equitable, Seventh Ave. at 52nd St. Open Mondays.)

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

Carolyn Brady—Watercolors set at Versailles, Giverny, and the artist's home in the south of France. Opens March 18. Through April 19. (Hoffman, 429 West Broadway.)

June Leaf—New paintings, drawings, and sculptures relating to the artist's split states of mind, which comes from dividing her time between northern Nova Scotia and New York City. Opens March 18. Through April 22. (Thorp, 103 Prince St.)

Mary Lucier—"Last Rites (Positano)," an interactive sound-and-video-based installation about the life of the artist's mother, Margaret Glosser. Opens March 18. Through April 22. (Lennon, Weinberg, 580 Broadway.)

Kay Rosen—Language-based pencil-on-paper drawings: puns, palindromes, linguistic acrobatics. Opens March 18. Through April 23. (Morris, 530 W. 22nd St. Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6.)

Group Show—"Pat Hearn Gallery, A Selected Survey, 1983-95" offers work by twenty-five artists, including Moira Dryer, Gretchen Faust, Jack Pierson, Ana Mendieta, Eva Hesse, Mark Morrisroe, and Lincoln Tobier. Opens March 18. Through May 7. (Hearn, 530 W. 22nd St. Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6.)

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Jennifer Bolande—Sculptures and recent photographs. In "Aerial Phonograph," a record spins slowly on a turntable; in place of a center label is a photograph of a circle of sky divers falling through the air. Through March 25. (Gibson, 568 Broadway.)

Elaine Lustig Cohen—Recent collages based on vintage photographs of female nudes. (A survey of Cohen's graphic-design work is at the Cooper-Hewitt Museum, through May 23.) Through April 8. (Saul, in a new space in the same building, 560 Broadway.)

Deborah Kass—"My Andy: A Retrospective," a group of new silk screens in which the artist has appropriated the style of Warhol's celebrity portraits, self-portraits, movies, and other works, but has depicted her grandmother, her dealer, herself, the Battery Tunnel, and the artists Elizabeth Murray and Cindy Sherman. Through April 8. (Freire, 130 Prince St.)

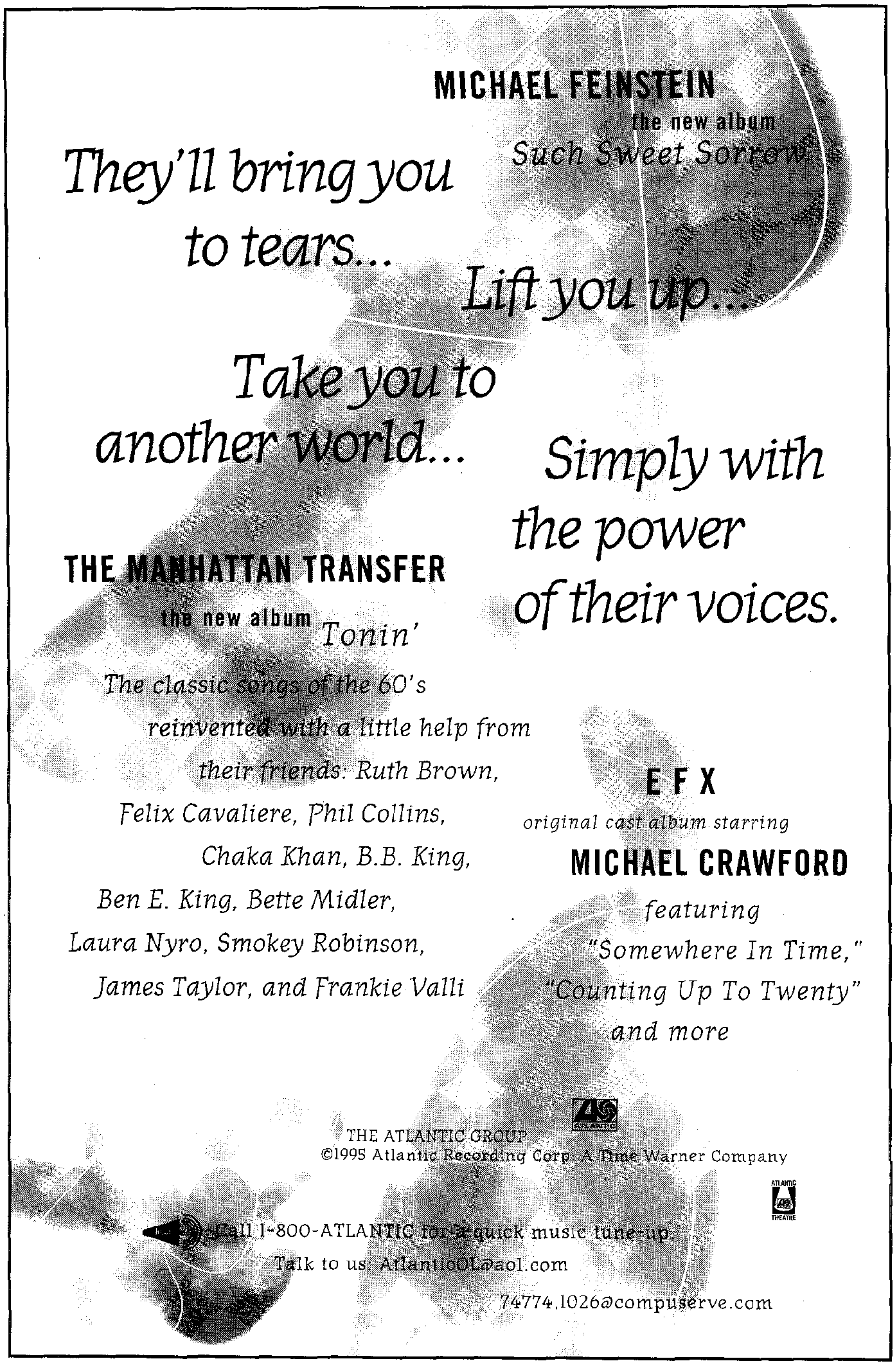
Kocheisen + Hullmann—Paintings and sculptures by this German team, who make a collaborative decision on a format, technique, and theme and then retire to separate studios to make the double works. Through April 5. (Nosei, 100 Prince St.)

Paul McCarthy—A new forty-five-minute video titled "Pinocchio Pipenose Householddilemma," by the astonishingly weird installation and performance artist. Viewers are required to don elaborate Pinocchio costumes. Through March 25. (Luhring Augustine, 130 Prince St.)

Kenneth Noland—A selection of early target paintings, later chevrons, and recent shaped canvases. Through March 25. (Castelli, 420 West Broadway.)

Tom Otterness—New sculptures in aluminum, bronze, or steel, of a thumb, a hand, a foot, an eye, and other body parts. Also on view are ink-on-paper studies and more finished renderings in graphite and watercolor. Through March 25. (Brooke Alexander, 59 Wooster St. . . . ¶ Works by Otterness and by the Ghanaian sculptor Bright Bimpong are at Skoto, 25 Prince St., through March 25. Open Tuesdays through Fridays, 4:30 to 8; Saturdays and Sundays, noon to 8.)

Richard Smith—A set of sombre, careful paintings from a Pop-meets-abstraction veteran. Layering the paint as if it were strips of fabric, the artist weaves a mostly muted palette of grays and blues into uneven grids



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ART—Cont'd

that evoke the dimensional studies of Vasarely and the anonymous structures of cells seen under a microscope. Through March 25. (Shafrazi, 119 Wooster St.)

FRANK STELLA—New two-dimensional paintings that appear to be in shallow relief. Through April 15. (Gagosian, 136 Wooster St.)

RICHARD TUTTLE—Eight wall sculptures using cloth, Styrofoam, and wood, which address the concept of whiteness. Through April 29. (Boone, 417 West Broadway.)

ROBERT WHITMAN—Six new installations that employ water, video projections, and various objects. In one piece, landscapes are projected onto sheets of falling black water. Through April 15. (Pace Wildenstein, 142 Greene St.)

JOHN ZINSSER—Using two colors per work, the artist takes his continuing dialogue with sixties color-field abstraction in two different directions. At times he revels in the materiality of the paint: in "Silent Years," the thick white resembles plaster or taffy on a mustard-yellow background. In other, larger works with glossy surfaces, he explores the paint's capacity for near-transparency: pale yellow shapes swim under a blood-red wash in "Stationary Travel"; yellowy shadows lurk in the underwater blue of "Finn's Knockout." Through March 25. (Stark, 594 Broadway.)

ANDREA ZITTEL—"Platform Bed" and "Pit Bed," two new functional works by a sculptor obsessed with making life more comfortable. Through April 8. (Rosen, 130 Prince St.)

"ENDURANCE"—Works, including documentation of performance pieces, that explore the stamina of the body and the mind. The artists include Eleanor Antin, Skip Arnold, Chris Burden, Bob Flanagan and Sheree Rose, Charlotte Moorman, and Joseph Beuys. Through April 15. (Exit Art, 548 Broadway. Open Friday and Saturday evenings until 8.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

SOTHEBY'S—March 15: American paintings, including a Harnett and a Hopper. . . . ¶ March 17: Contemporary furniture and ceramics. . . . ¶ March 18-19: Art Nouveau and Art Deco. . . . ¶ March 21: Sales of Chinese paintings and books open a week devoted to Asian art. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 606-7000.)

CHRISTIE'S—March 16 at 10: American paintings and sculpture, including notable works by Maurice Prendergast, Edward Redfield, and Charles Courtney Curran. (Park Ave. at 59th St. 546-1000.)

SWANN GALLERIES—Armchair adventurers will find vicarious thrills between the covers, at an auction of travel and sporting books offering such titles as Stanley's "How I Found Livingstone" (first American edition, 1872), "Days and Nights of Salmon Fishing in the Tweed" (1843), and an eighteenth-century guide called "The Gentleman's Compleat Jockey . . . to Which Is Added, The Art of Vermine-Killing." (104 E. 25th St. 254-4710. March 16 at 10:30.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

BERND AND HILLA BECHER—"Industrial Facades," a new series of six-part works, in the clinical, detached manner characteristic of the artists. Opens March 18. Through April 15. (Sonnabend, 420 West Broadway.)

JAMES CASEBERE—Color photographs of prison interiors. Opens March 18. Through April 22. (Klein, 40 Wooster St.)

LYNN DAVIS—Twenty years' worth of landscape, architectural, and nude studies. Opens March 16. Through May 13. (Houk Friedman, 851 Madison Ave., at 70th St.)

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MANUEL ALVAREZ BRAVO—Thirty of the Mexican fantasist's platinum/palladium-print and silver-print nudes, made between 1938 and 1991. Through March 25. (Witkin, 415 West Broadway.)

LOIS CONNER—Panoramic views of ruins, temples, and towns in Cambodia and Vietnam. Through April 15. (Laurence Miller, 138 Spring St.)

TED CRONER—New York City night scenes of moving cars and luminous buildings, taken in the late forties and early fifties. Through April 8. (Greenberg, 120 Wooster St.)

NAN GOLDIN—The artist's reworked "Ballad of Sexual Dependency" (1982), a forty-five-minute color-slide-with-soundtrack presentation, is being screened three times a day, at 1, 3, and 5. Also on view are new medium-format pictures taken in Tokyo, Berlin, Salzburg, and New York, and twelve large-scale works. Through April 16. (Marks, 522 W. 22nd St. Open Thursdays through Sundays, noon to 6.)

DOROTHEA LANGE (1895-1965)—"American Photographs," a selection of works from throughout the artist's career. Through April 30. (International Center of Photography, 1130 Fifth Ave., at 94th St. Open daily, except Mondays, 11 to 6, and Tuesday evenings until 8.)

JOEL MEYEROWITZ—A collection of photographs in which the artist explores the nature of cities—specifically St. Louis, Atlanta, New York, and St. Petersburg (Russia). Through April 8. (Benrubi, 52 E. 76th St.)

JOHN MILLER—"The Middle of the Day"—seventy-five photos taken between the hours of noon and 2, in Berlin, Frankfurt, Bremen, New York, Los Angeles, and rural areas of New Jersey and Vermont. Through April 2. (Metro Pictures, 150 Greene St.)

RICHARD MISRACH—Selections from the "Salt Flats" series and from a new series focussing on clouds. Through March 18. (Marcus, 578 Broadway.)

FLORIS NEUSÜSS / MARCEL BROODTHAERS (1924-76)—Life-size photograms from 1960 to the present, made with human figures, flowers, and found objects. / Photoworks incorporating drawing and collage by the Belgian Conceptualist. Through April 29. (Sander, 19 E. 76th St.)

SEBASTIÃO SALGADO—A collection of two hundred and fifty photographs, titled "Workers: An Archaeology of the Industrial Age." Through May 26. (International Center of Photography Midtown, Sixth Ave. at 43rd St. Open daily, except Mondays, 11 to 6, and Tuesday evenings until 8.)

NAOMI SAVAGE—"Men in Music—1949" includes portraits of John Cage, Virgil Thomson, Paul Bowles, and Gian Carlo Menotti. Also on view are recent color laser prints on gold foil. Through April 1. (Snyder, 20 W. 57th St.)

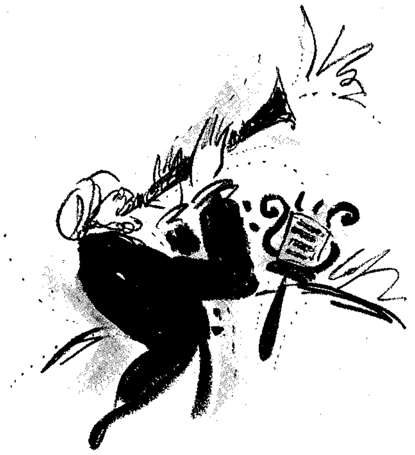
AARON SISKIND (1903-91)—The artist's last series of photographs is the "Tar Pictures"—close-up views of streaks of tar on the asphalt roads of New England. Through April 29. (Mann, 42 E. 76th St.)

MAGGIE STEBER and **ALEX WEBB**—Two separate groups of photographs taken in Haiti: Steber's are primarily from 1994, Webb's from 1986-88. Through April 5. (Leica, 670 Broadway. Opens Saturdays at noon.)

"1936"—Photos taken in that year, by such masters as Weston, Lange, Cartier-Bresson, Abbott, and Rodchenko. Through April 8. (Danziger, 130 Prince St.)

"1956"—Photos taken in *that* year, by such masters as Klein, Frank, Callahan, and Siskind. Through April 8. (Gallery 292, 120 Wooster St.)

(See the museum listings for photography exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art and the New Museum.)



Giora Feidman, with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center.

LAURIE LAFRANCE

CLASSICAL MUSIC

Visionary

If you think of Giora Feidman as a klezmer clarinettist, he would like to set you straight. "People today think 'klezmer' means Jewish traditional music," the internationally renowned musician explains, "but that's wrong. Klezmer comes from two Hebrew words—'keley' and 'zemer'—which translate as 'instrumental song.' But song comes from the soul, not from the clarinet, and it goes beyond religions." Just call him a klezmer—that he likes. "When I joined the Israel Philharmonic, in 1957" (he would remain the orchestra's principal clarinettist for eighteen years), "the Eastern European musicians would compliment you by saying, 'Man, you are a klezmer!' "

The composer Osvaldo Golijov was a child when he met the clarinettist twenty-five years ago—they are both Jews from Buenos Aires—and he has always admired his musicianship and spirituality. Last year, he presented Feidman with a clarinet quintet titled "The Dreams and Prayers of Isaac the Blind," a meditation on a Biblical tale. Feidman and the Cleveland String Quartet (whose cellist, Paul Katz, is a long-standing Feidman fan) gave the piece its première last August in an ancient church on the North Frisian island of Föhr, a venue so removed from distractions that it practically enforced a meditative frame of mind. Feidman, whose own failing eyesight requires him to wear a sort of jeweler's loupe when reading music, evoked the blind patriarch of the title, and the audience was rapt throughout. When the same musicians—klezmers all—play Golijov's quintet three times this week, in concerts of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, they'll offer a not-to-be-missed experience in soul music of another kind.

(The box-office number for the Metropolitan Opera House is 362-6000; for Avery Fisher Hall, 875-5030; for Carnegie Hall and Weill Recital Hall, 247-7800; and for Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St., 362-8719.)

OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA—**IDOMENEO**, with Carol Vaness, Dawn Upshaw, Anne Sofie von Otter, Plácido Domingo, and Ryland Davies; conducted by James Levine. (March 15, 18, and 21, all at 8.) . . . **SIMON BOCCANEGRA**, with

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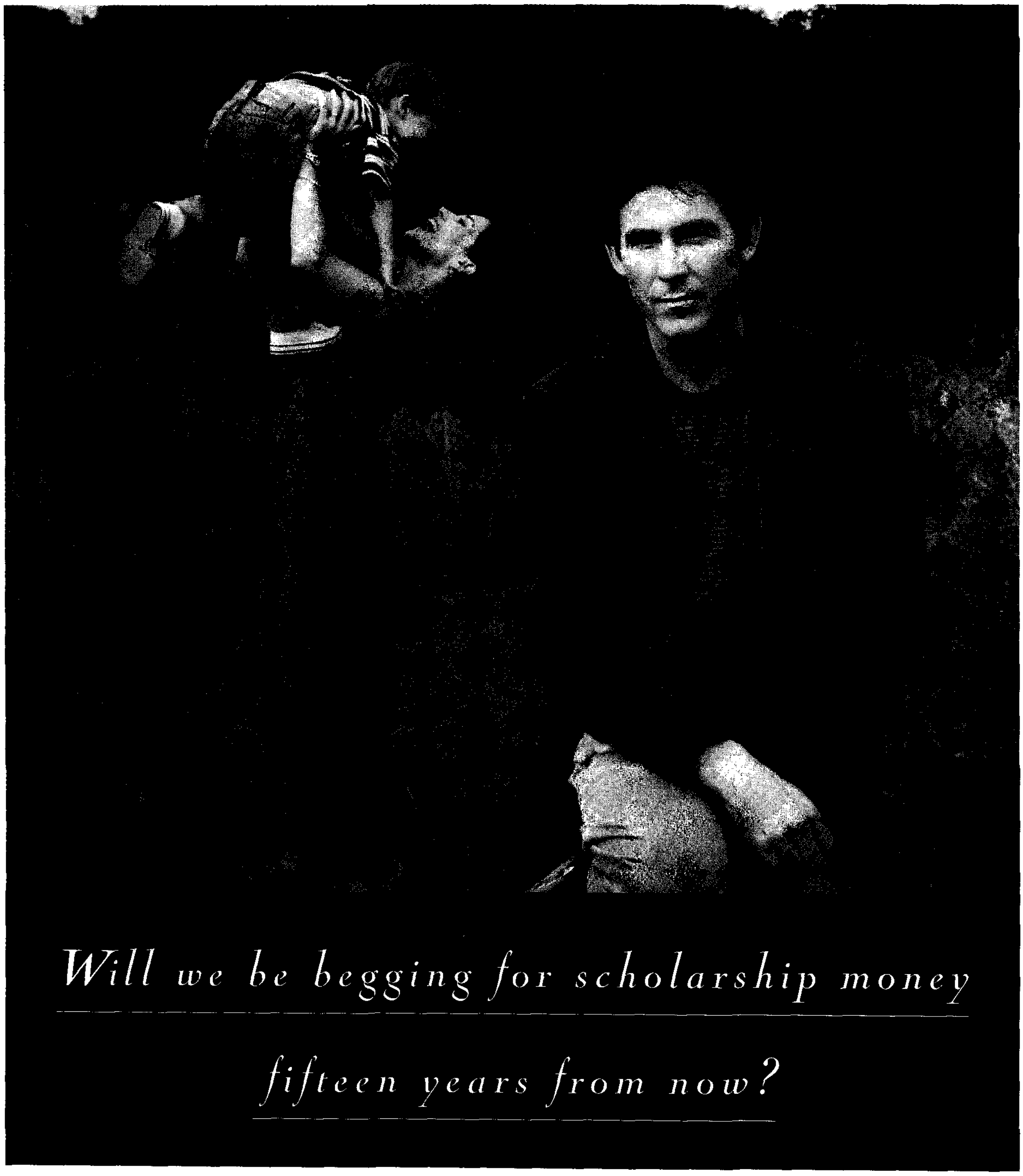
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CLASSICAL MUSIC—Cont'd

Andrea Gruber, Giorgio Lamberti, Vladimir Chernov, and Paul Plishka; Mr. Levine. (March 16 at 8.) . . . **LA TRAVIATA**, with Veronica Villarroel, Frank Lopardo, and Juan Pons; John Fiore. (March 17 at 8.) . . . With Ainhoa Arteta, Francisco Araiza, and Mr. Pons; Mr. Fiore. (March 20 at 8.) . . . **LA BOHÈME**, with Nucia Focile, Diana Soviero, Luis Lima, and Roberto Frontali; Mr. Fiore. (March 18 at 1:30.) (Metropolitan Opera House.)

New York City Opera—**LA TRAVIATA**, in a new production. (March 16 at 8.) . . . **CARMEN**. (March 17 at 8.) . . . **LE NOZZE DI FIGARO**. (March 18 at 1:30.) . . . **MADAMA BUTTERFLY**. (March 18 at 8.) . . . **LA RONDINE**. (March 19 at 1:30.) (New York State Theatre. 870-5570.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

New York Philharmonic—Colin Davis conducts Mozart's Symphony No. 39 and Mahler's Symphony No. 4 (with soprano Gillian Webster). (Avery Fisher Hall. March 16 and March 18 at 8; March 17 at 2; and March 21 at 7:30.)

LISTENING BOOTH

"**Family Connections**"; soprano Charlotte de Rothschild and pianist Malcolm Martineau (IMP Masters). Musical autograph albums such as the one that inspired the Morgan Library's March 16 concert were popular in nineteenth-century Paris. In one of the most intriguing recordings of recent months, a present-day Rothschild sings works inscribed in her family's volume. Mendelssohn helped inaugurate it, in 1829; augmented through ensuing generations, the collection's pages brim with entries by Rossini, Bellini, Halévy, Barber, Poulenc, and many others. Some pieces (including a Chopin mazurka) differ from their published versions; several, including a Cherubini aria and a Meyerbeer song, appear solely in the Rothschilds' album. Charlotte de Rothschild, whose attractive voice has earned her a career as a recitalist and oratorio soloist, intersperses treasures from the family album among other works associated with home musicales—most notably, songs composed by her cigar-smoking ancestor Mathilde de Rothschild, who was three years younger than the family album for which she secured entries by Anton Rubinstein and Arthur Sullivan.

New York Virtuoso Singers—Harold Rosenbaum directs settings of vernal texts, by Janequin, Hindemith, Britten, and many others. (Merkin Concert Hall. March 18 at 8.)

Waseda Symphony Orchestra Tokyo—Performing Berlioz' "Benvenuto Cellini" Overture, Toshiro Mayuzumi's "Bugaku," Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 2 (with Misha Dichter), and Franck's D-Minor Symphony. Hiroyuki Isaki conducts. (Carnegie Hall. March 18 at 8.)

New Amsterdam Singers—Clara Longstreth directs choral works by Ildebrando Pizzetti (his Requiem Mass), Rheinberger, Berlioz, Brahms, Wolf, and Fanny Hensel (née Mendelssohn). (St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. March 18 at 8. Tickets at the door on the night of the concert.)

City Island Baroque Ensemble—Paul Green is the soloist in Mozart's Clarinet Concerto. Anton Miller is spotlighted in violin concertos by Vivaldi. (Le Refuge Inn, 620 City Island Ave., City Island, the Bronx. 1-718 885-2478. March 19 at noon.)

Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra—Performing David Diamond's "Rounds for String Orchestra," Rudolf Barshai's orchestral expansion of Shostakovich's String Quartet No. 8, Giya Kancheli's "Abii ne viderem" (featuring violist Kim Kashkashian), and Philip Glass's Symphony No. 3. Dennis Russell Davies conducts. (Alice Tully Hall. 875-5050. March 19 at 2.)

Choral Symphony Society Cantata Singers—In a concert rescheduled from Feb. 5, David Labovitz directs Brahms' "Liebeslieder Waltzes," as well as works by Haydn, Schubert, and Bruckner. (Christ and St. Stephen's Church, 120 W. 69th St. March 19 at 2. Tickets at *the door on the afternoon of the concert.)*

BachWorks—The chorus and orchestra, with soloists, performs cantatas by Buxtehude and Bach (No. 131 and No. 150). Richard Erickson directs. (St. Paul's German Lutheran Church, 315 W. 22nd St. March 19 at 5. Tickets at the door on the afternoon of the concert.)

Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra—Jesús López-Cobos conducts Wagner's "Der Fliegende Holländer" Overture, Mozart's Concerto for *Two Pianos (with Katia and Marielle La*bèque), and Bruckner's Symphony No. 7. (Carnegie Hall. March 20 at 8.)

Choir of Winchester Cathedral—The British choristers perform Rheinberger's Mass in E-Flat Major, Britten's Te Deum, and motets by Bruckner, among other works. David Hill directs. (St. Thomas Church, Fifth Ave. at 53rd St. 757-7013. March 21 at 7:30.)

Cincinnati Pops Orchestra—Erich Kunzel leads music that Hollywood made famous; trumpeter Doc Severinsen, singers Leslie Uggams and Lee Roy Reams, drummer Ed Shaughnessy, and the Indiana University Singing Hoosiers all take their turns in the spotlight. (Carnegie Hall. March 21 at 8.)

RECITALS

Speculum Musicae—New works by George Crumb are as important as they are rare. His "Quest" (for solo guitar, soprano saxophone, harp, contrabass, and two percussionists) was more than five years in the making, and when it was premièred last fall, in Vienna, what was heard coincided rather little with what the composer had written. "Quest" finally receives its American première, with guitarist David Starobin (for whom it was written) assisting his colleagues in the contemporary-music group in what will probably be its first accurate representation. The evening also includes Elliott Carter's "90+" and Eric Moe's "Kicking and Screaming" (both featuring pianist Aleck Karis), as well as the premières of Wayne Peterson's Duo for Violin and Piano and Jon Deak's "Nature's Cure" (a viola concerto, with Maureen Gallagher as soloist). (Merkin Concert Hall. March 15 at 8.)

St. Luke's Chamber Ensemble—Performing Jeffery Cotton's Trio for Clarinet, Cello, and Harp; Erik Lundborg's String Quartet; and Hindemith's Clarinet Quintet. (Guggenheim Museum SoHo, 575 Broadway. March 15 at 8. For information about tickets, call 840-7470.)

Thomas Murray—Playing organ works by Bach, Mozart, and Julius Reubke (his "Sonata on the 94th Psalm"), among others. (St. Bartholomew's Church, Park Ave. at 50th St. 751-1616, ext. 248. March 15 at 8.)

Brian Hunter—Tenor, singing Irish chestnuts and classical standards once championed by John McCormack. (Weill Recital Hall. March 15 at 8.)

Musical Mementos—The Morgan Library's musical collection includes an autograph album in which sixty-three nineteenth-century visitors to the home of the French oboist Gustave Vogt inscribed short pieces as souvenirs. Compositions from the Vogt volume—by Berlioz, Gounod, Liszt, and others—will be performed in a concert that also includes two other works whose manuscripts the library owns: Schumann's "Fantasiestücke" (Op. 88, for piano trio) and Beethoven's F-Minor String Quartet (Op. 95). (Morgan Library, 29 E. 36th St. 685-0008, ext. 347. March 16 at 6:15.)

Bargemusic—Violinist Robert Chen and pianist James Winn perform Ravel's Violin Sonata; violist Toby Hoffman and cellist Ronald Thomas join them for piano quartets by Mozart (in E-Flat Major) and Brahms (in C Minor). (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 1-718 624-4061. March 16 at 7:30 and March 19 at 4.)

Festival Chamber Music Society—Performing Mozart's E-Major Piano Trio (K. 542), Bartók's "Contrasts," and Fauré's G-Minor Piano Quartet. (Merkin Concert Hall. March 16 at 8.)

Purcell Festival—Conductor Nicholas McGe*gan and the Arcadian Academy (a vocal and* instrumental early-music group) oversee a celebration of the English composer, the three-hundredth anniversary of whose death is being observed this year. March 17 at 8: A concert of music by Purcell and his contemporaries, with readings from seventeenth-century English authors mixed in. . . . **NOTE:** A pre-concert lecture begins at 7. . . . ¶ March 18 at 2 (until 5) and 7: Lectures on Purcell's England. . . . At 8: An all-Purcell concert. (Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 570-3949.)

Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center—March 17 at 8 and March 19 at 5: Clarinettist Giora Feidman and the Cleveland String Quartet perform Osvaldo Golijov's Clarinet Quintet, "The Dreams and Prayers of Isaac the Blind," in a concert that also includes Schubert's C-Minor Quartettsatz, Beethoven's Violin Sonata No. 2, Turina's "La Oración del Torero," and Brahms' G-Major Sextet. (Alice Tully Hall.) . . . ¶ March 20 at 8: Mr. Feidman and the Cleveland Quartet reprise Golijov's Clarinet Quintet on a program that also includes recent chamber works by Dan Welcher, Martin Bresnick, and David Sanford. (Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center, 165 W. 65th St., plaza level. For information about tickets, call 875-5050.)

Vanbrugh String Quartet—An Irish foursome, playing quartets by Janáček (his First), Beethoven (in A Minor, Op. 132), and the Anglo-Irish composer E. J. Moeran (in E-Flat Major). (Weill Recital Hall. March 18 at 2.)

Joshua Bell—The violinist, assisted by pianist Paul Coker, performs sonatas by Beethoven (his Twelfth), Grieg, and Prokofiev (his First), as well as Aaron Jay Kernis's "Air." (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100. March 18 at 8.)

Kiri Te Kanawa—The soprano sings arias and songs by Mozart, Strauss, Copland, and others; with pianist James Levine. (Carnegie Hall. March 19 at 3.)

Florence Gould Hall Chamber Players—Pianist Gabriel Tacchino and violinist Mark Peskanov assist the ensemble in a program that includes Franck's Violin Sonata, Poulenc's "Mouvements Perpétuels," Hindemith's "Petite Sonata" for viola d'amore and piano, and Fauré's G-Major Piano Quartet. (Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. 355-6160. March 19 at 3.)

Nomos Duo—Performing violin-and-piano sonatas by Mozart, his contemporary Joseph Schuster, and Beethoven. (Bloomingdale House, 323 W. 108th St. March 19 at 3. No tickets necessary.)

Shayne Doty—Organist, playing a wide-ranging program that includes Pierre Dumage's "Suite du Premier Ton," Bach's C-Minor Fantasy and Fugue, and the theme-and-variations movement from Widor's Symphony No. 5. (Church of St. Ignatius Loyola, Park Ave. at 84th St. 288-2520. March 19 at 4.)

An Die Musik—The chamber ensemble offers works by Jerzy Sapieyevski, Haydn, Arnold Cooke, and Schumann (his Piano Quartet). (Merkin Concert Hall. March 19 at 4.)

Christopher Costanza and Ilan Rechtman—The cellist and the pianist perform sonatas by Brahms (in F Major) and Vivaldi. (Hotel Wales, Madison Ave. at 92nd St. March 19 at 6 and 8. No tickets necessary.)

New York Wind Soloists—Presenting a program of chamber works by the young Beethoven; pianist Eugene Istomin, violinist Ik-Hwan Bae, and violist Cynthia Phelps assist. (Borden Auditorium, Manhattan School of Music, Broadway at 122nd St. March 19 at 8. No tickets necessary.)

Veronika String Quartet—A Russian ensemble, playing quartets by Shostakovich (his Third), Steven Gerber (his Third), and Tchaikovsky (his Second). (Merkin Concert Hall. March 20 at 8.)

New Music Consort and Pulse Percussion Ensemble—In a concert that includes two timpani solos by Carter, Wen Loong-hsing's "Phenomena III," and the premières of Wuorinen's Percussion Quartet and Leroy Jenkins' "Hula-palula" (in which the composer will play an electrified violin). (Borden Auditorium, Manhattan School of Music, Broadway at 122nd St. 749-2802. March 20 at 8.)

Mair-Davis Duo—Mandolinist Marilynn Mair and classical guitarist Mark Davis play solo and ensemble works by Beethoven (his Mandolin Sonatina), Paganini, Krenek, and others. (Weill Recital Hall. March 20 at 8.)

Walter Hilse—Organist, performing Bach's "The Art of Fugue" on its composer's three-hundred-and-tenth birthday. (Park Avenue Christian Church, Park Ave. at 85th St. March 21 at 7:30. Tickets at the door on the evening of the concert.)

Leonardo Trio—Playing piano trios by Beethoven (in D Major, Op. 70, No. 1, the "Ghost"), Schumann (in F Major, Op. 80), and Wolfgang Rihm (his "Fremde Szene I"). (Miller Theatre, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 854-7799. March 21 at 8.)

Pro Arte String Quartet—The ensemble, a long-time champion of twentieth-century music, performs quartets by Samuel Adler (his Eighth), Ruth Crawford Seeger, Jeff Hayes, and George Perle (his Eighth, subtitled "Windows of Order"). (Weill Recital Hall. March 21 at 8.)

Nokuthula Ngwenyama—Violist, playing Brahms' E-Flat-Major Sonata, Bach's unaccompanied Suite in G Major, and works by Bartók, Kreisler, Paganini, and Dan Coleman; with pianist Reiko Uchida. Presented by Young Concert Artists. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100. March 21 at 8.)

FOR KIDS

(Accompanied by parents or other adults.)

"Kids Dance"—Students from the New Ballet School, founded by choreographer Eliot Feld to encourage talented dancers from the city's schools, take the Joyce stage with "Half Time," "Hello Fancy," "The Envelope," and "23 Skidoo." (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. March 18 at 2.)

Big Apple Circus—If your child should run away and join the circus, this would be the circus of choice. For the next two weeks, the troupe makes the first of its five spring stops around the city, in Queens. (Cunningham Park. 268-0055. March 14 and 20 at 11, March 15 at 11 and 7:30, March 16-17 at 11 and 7, and March 18-19 at 12:30 and 4:30.)

Silly Billy—The Clown Prince lives up to his name, performing the magic and rev-'em-up comedy that have made him a legend with the birthday-party set. (West Side Kids Theatre, Lincoln Square Synagogue, 208 Amsterdam Ave., at 69th St. March 19 at 2. For information about tickets, call 877-6115.)

"Zhang Boils the Ocean"—Zhang wants to marry the undersea dragon princess; when her father objects, Zhang boils the ocean, which not only makes a big crab soup, but also gets the father to change his mind. The Chinese Theatre Workshop brings the fairy tale to the stage with shadow play, a fifteen-foot dragon puppet, and traditional dance. (Henry Street Settlement, 466 Grand St. 598-0400. March 18 at 2.)

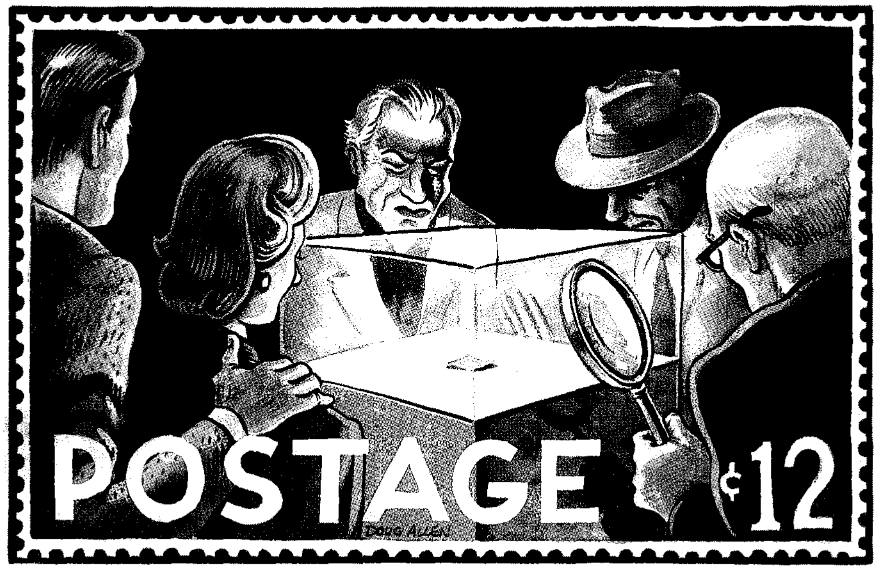
Go Fly a Kite—David Klein of Big City Kites shows kids how to make a sled kite (it has a rectangular shape and double runners), which they'll decorate and then take out to the Park to fly for themselves. (Dana Discovery Center, Fifth Ave. at 110th St., in Central Park. 860-1370. March 19 at 1 and 2.)

Magical David—Tie-dye, magical guitar-synthesizer tricks, a playlist of "silly, messed-up songs." Been there. But the kids haven't. (West End Gate Children's Theatre, Broadway at 113th St. 662-8830. March 18 at 1:30.)

DOUG ALLEN

ABOVE AND BEYOND

Border Report—The Mexican journalist and novelist Elena Poniatowska, who will talk at Barnard on March 21 about the impact of women writers in Latin America, has had a strong influence on her own country. In 1971, this woman of genteel birth (in Paris, to a Polish count and a wealthy Mexican expatriate) published a book-length account of the Mexican government's violent suppression of a 1968 student demonstration, juxtaposing eyewitness accounts of the massacre and documentary material from both sides. Dedicated to her brother Jan, one of the three hundred and twenty-five who died on the Plaza of Tlatelolco, the book sparked a debate over accountability that the country's ruling party is still straining to deal with. The prolific author (she has written more than twenty-five novels and nonfiction books over a forty-year period, in addition to her regular biweekly newspaper column) recently spent time in the jungles of Chiapas interviewing peasant women in the E.Z.L.N., the guerrilla force fighting under Subcomandante Marcos. (Lehman Auditorium, Barnard College, Broadway at 117th St. March 21 at 4:30. No tickets necessary.)



The Stamp Show, at Madison Square Garden.

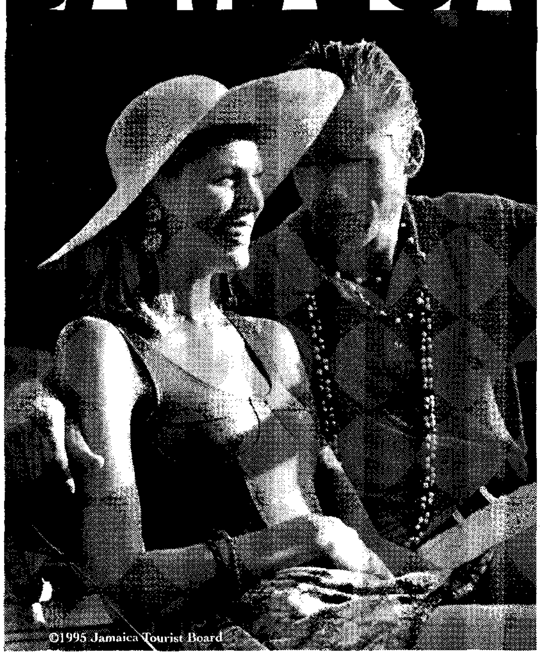
Walking the Line—The Empire State Building shines emerald green on March 17, for St. Patrick's Day. At 8:30 A.M., a march sponsored by the Irish Lesbian and Gay Organization is scheduled to begin at the steps of the New York Public Library, Fifth Ave. at 42nd St. If it receives its permit (which was being delayed at press time by court proceedings), it will advance along the same route as the traditional parade, which begins at 11 and follows Grand Marshal John Cardinal O'Connor up the green line on Fifth Ave., from 44th St. to 86th St., then east to Third Ave. . . . ¶ March 17 at 9:30: "Sodom and Beghorrah," an Irish variety show, features James Graham and Them Keener Boys, at the Sidewalk Café, 94 Avenue A. . . . ¶ March 18 at 1: For those with a thirst for Hibernian history, Big Onion Walking Tours visits the former Little Ireland in Lower Manhattan. For more information, call 439-1090.

Stamp Act—The United States Postal Service has timed the release of three new stamps (of a flag, a jukebox, and a Cadillac tail fin) to coincide with the Garden's philately convention. Lectures complement the gallery exhibitions, in which stamp-producing powers like the Vatican, San Marino, Tuvalu, and the Pitcairn Islands are heavily represented. (Madison Square Garden Exposition Rotunda, Seventh Ave. at 32nd St. March 16, from noon to 8; March 17-18, from 10 to 6; and March 19, from 10 to 4. No tickets necessary.)

Readings—March 15 at 6:30: Elinor Lipman reads from her new novel, "Isabel's Bed." (Rizzoli, 454 West Broadway. No tickets necessary.) . . . ¶ March 15 at 6:30: Actors offer selections from the latest edition of "Best American Short Stories," edited by Tobias Wolff: Francis Ruivivar reads Sherman Alexie's "This Is What It Means to Say Phoenix, Arizona," and Mary Beth Hurt reads Carol Anshaw's "Hammam." (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 864-5400.) . . . ¶ March 15 at 8: Allen Ginsberg, Lee Ranaldo, Clark Coolidge, and Maggie Estep, among others, honor King Beat Jack Kerouac with readings from his works and letters. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. Tickets at the door on the night of the reading.) . . . ¶ March 19 at 6:30: Amanda Filipacchi ("Nude Men"), David Bowman ("Let the Dog Drive"), Elizabeth Shepard ("H"), and Jonathan Lethem ("Gun, with Occasional Music") read from their novels. (KGB, 85 E. 4th St. No tickets necessary.) . . . ¶ March 20 at 7:30: Composer Ned Rorem reads from "Knowing When to Stop," a memoir of his youth. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 645-5848.)

Talks—March 16 at 7: In a talk titled "Pseudo-Science, Social Fad, Literary Wonder," scholar Ellis Shookman looks into the character of Johann Caspar Lavater, founder of the art of physiognomy. (Swiss Institute, 495 Broadway, at Spring St. No tickets necessary.) . . . ¶ March 19 at 4: Susan Hellauer, of the women's vocal quartet Anonymous 4, discusses the sources and performance of medieval chant, then leads the audience in chanting. (Corpus Christi Church, 529 W. 121st St. 666-0675.) . . . ¶ March 21 at 6: Editors Joe Dolce (*Details*), Hendrik Hertzberg (*The New Yorker*), Michael Hirschorn (*New York*), and Michael Solomon (*Esquire*) talk about recent transformations of popular magazines. (Hotel Warwick, Sixth Ave. at 54th St. For information about reservations, call the American Society of Journalists and Authors at 997-0947.)

Memo—You may be cutting down on eggs lately, but they can still be profitably used. Balancing one on its end at the moment of the vernal equinox—9:14 P.M. on March 20—will bring you good luck, according to Donna Henes, of Celestially Auspicious Occasions. Ms. Henes will lead the balancing act on the Battery Park City esplanade, south of the North Cove. For more information, call 416-5320.



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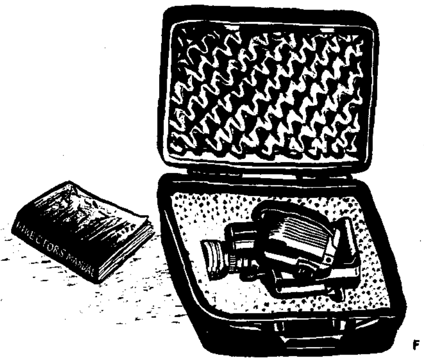


THE MOVIES

FILMS OPENING THIS WEEK

Bye Bye, Love—Matthew Modine, Paul Reiser, and Randy Quaid in a comedy about three single fathers who have weekend custody of their children. Directed by Sam Weisman. Written by Gary David Goldberg and Brad Hall. Opening March 17. (Gotham Cinema, Orpheum VII, Art Greenwich Twin, Chelsea Cinemas, 62nd & Broadway, and Criterion Center.)

Candyman: Farewell to the Flesh—Tony Todd reprises his role as the hook-limbed spectre of New Orleans, who materializes to terrorize those who utter his name five times in a row. With Kelly Rowan, Timothy Carhart, Veronica Cartwright, and William O'Leary. Directed by Bill Condon. Written by Rand Ravich and Mark Kruger. Opening March 17. (Movieland 8th Street Triplex.)

Circle of Friends—A comedy about first love, in which a plain girl—Minnie Driver, off to college in Dublin with her two best friends from home, Geraldine O'Rawe and Saffron Burrows—falls for Chris O'Donnell. Also featuring Alan Cumming and Colin Firth. Directed by Pat O'Connor. Written by Andrew Davies, from Maeve Binchy's 1990 novel. Opening March 15. (Baronet.)

Farinelli—In this historical drama directed by Gérard Corbiau, Stefano Dionisi is Carlo Broschi, one of eighteenth-century Europe's most famous castrati; Enrico Loverso appears as his composer brother Riccardo. With Jeroen Krabbé as Handel. Written by the director, Marcel Beaulieu, and Andrée Corbiau. In French. Opening March 17. (Lincoln Square.)

Losing Isaiah—Jessica Lange plays a social worker struggling to keep possession of the boy she has adopted, and Halle Berry is the child's natural mother, who wants him back, in a drama directed by Stephen Gyllenhaal. With David Strathairn, Samuel L. Jackson, and Cuba Gooding, Jr. Written by Naomi Foner. Opening March 17. (Village Theatre VII, 34th Street Showplace, Tower East Chelsea Cinemas, Lincoln Square, and Embassy 1.)

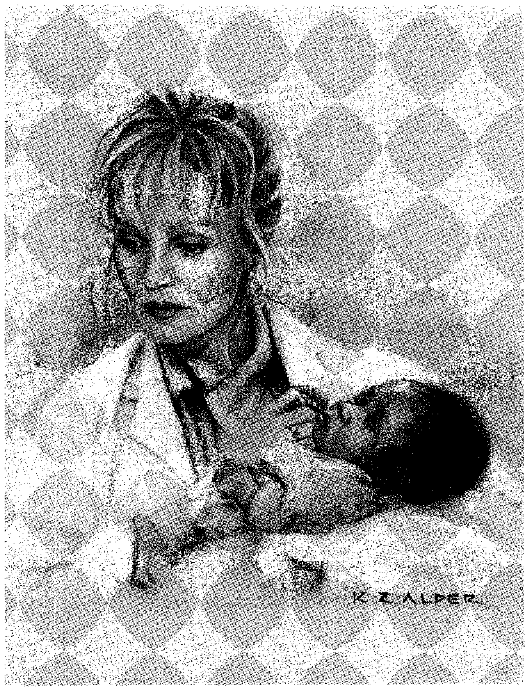
Naked Killer—An action film from Hong Kong about a cop (Simon Yam) on the trail of the lesbian assassins Kitty (Chingmy Yau), Princess (Carrie Ng), Baby (Kelly Yao), and Sister Cindy (Svenwara Madoka). Directed by Clarence Fok. Written by Wong Jing. In Cantonese. Opening March 17. (Cinema Village.)

CURRENT FILMS

(The signed notes are by Whitney Balliett, Bruce Diones, Sarah Kerr, Anthony Lane, Terrence Rafferty, and Michael Sragow. If a movie has been reviewed in The Current Cinema, the date of its review is given. Theatre addresses and phone numbers are listed on page 36.)

Before Sunrise—Richard Linklater's third movie is provocatively plotless. Jesse (Ethan Hawke) and Céline (Julie Delpy) meet on a train, decide to get off together, and have themselves a fine, sleepless time before parting the next day. That's it: various threats loom up and fade away, and the only suspense comes from wondering whether the two characters (who are pretty much the only characters) will stop talking long enough to have sex. The charm—the midsummer enchantment—never feels forced; it steals up and wins you. A true romance.—A.L. (1/30/94) (First & 62nd Cinemas and Olympia.)

Before the Rain—A strange, confusing, and confident picture from the Macedonian director Milcho Manchevski. He has the sensibility of someone who has seen quite enough to rid him of political illusion; watching the film, you'd never guess that he's only thirty-five. The first and third parts are set in Macedonia, where a young monk (Gregoire Colin) harbors a refugee (Labina Mitevska) from the local Albanian minority. His uncle, the chunky and fearless Aleksandar (Rade Serbedzija), has come home to get some peace. Not a chance: this is a place where villages are torn in two. The middle section, a scrap of love affair set in London, is less successful, although even here the editing is so beautifully paced that Manchevski makes you sense fault lines running all over the world. He sees through hope and bigotry alike, and even when his complex rotary narrative makes no logical sense, it never stops making emotional sense. In Macedonian.—A.L. (3/13/95) (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)



Opening March 17, Jessica Lange in "Losing Isaiah."

KELYNN Z. ALDER

Boys on the Side—In this semi-comic tearjerker, three seemingly incompatible women—a salty gay singer (Whoopi Goldberg), a young, restless beauty (Drew Barrymore), and an ailing career gal (Mary-Louise Parker)—bond on the run and settle down in Tucson. Earthy, Sexy, and Sickly create a nontraditional family; men damage or frustrate them. The token male happiness-maker, a cop who woos Barrymore, is so sweet and slow that you half expect him to compare life to a box of chocolates. Herbert Ross directed, from a script by Don Roos.—M.S. (Village Theatre VII, 19th Street East 6, Manhattan Twin, Orpheum VII, Lincoln Square, and Criterion Center.)

The Brady Bunch Movie—There's a cardboard plot involving Michael McKean as an evil real-estate developer, but really this is a relaxed, hit-or-miss eighty-nine-minute skit. Gary Cole stands out as A Man Named Brady, a sweet optimist forever dispensing officious advice and nonsensical proverbs, but the three daughters—Christine Taylor as perfect, bitchy Marcia (updated with a lesbian admirer), Olivia Hack as lisping Cindy, and Jennifer Elise Cox as tortured Jan, the poster girl of adolescent neurosis—steal the show. Shelley Long, the most inevitable casting choice of the year, has surprisingly little to do as Carol. Directed by Betty Thomas.—S.K. (19th Street East 6, 34th Street Showplace, First & 62nd Cinemas, East 85th Street, Waverly, 84th Street Sixplex, and Embassy.)

Bullets Over Broadway—A nicely structured piece of silliness from Woody Allen, set in the theatre world of the nineteen-twenties. John Cusack is the Woody substitute, an earnest young playwright who needs to discover an existence beyond the stage; Chazz Palminteri shines as the taciturn gangster who swaps places with him, becoming as ruthless in his aesthetics as he is with a gun. Around this neat switch Allen assembles a crowd of near-caricatures—opportunities for Dianne Wiest, Jim Broadbent, Jennifer Tilly, and others to show their stuff.—A.L. (10/24/94) (34th St. East, First & 62nd Cinemas, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, and Waverly. . . . ¶ 62nd & Broadway; through March 16.)

Exotica—A mysterious search through tall grass; a strip joint where the girls weave, untouchable, in front of the customers; a pet store drowning in hot green light: yes, it's the world according to Atom Egoyan. His latest picture sidles along in the tranquillized, deadpan manner that he cultivated in "Family Viewing" and "The Adjuster." His fans believe that this style hooks into the secret, subterranean rhythms of society (if any director could do justice to Don DeLillo, it's Egoyan); the rest of us may suspect that there's less going on here than meets, and seduces, the eye. The plot is so closely woven that it verges on the incestuous. Having lost a daughter, Francis (Bruce Greenwood) finds a substitute in Christina (Mia Kirshner), a young dancer who dresses like a schoolgirl; after he runs into trouble with her, he enlists the help of a gay egg smuggler (don't ask) played by Don McKellar. The actors have to flatten their performances to match the weirdness—the occasional trill of guilt and rage feels about as spontaneous as an alarm clock. The movie is lush, enraptured, and almost no fun at all. It dances in front of us with the erotic blankness of Christina at Francis's table.—A.L. (Angelika Film Center, 68th Street Playhouse, and 84th Street Sixplex.)

Forrest Gump—As all the world now knows, Tom Hanks plays Forrest Gump, a simple Alabama soul who serves his country without hurting a fly; he saves his comrades in Vietnam, woos the dippy Jenny (Robin Wright), and runs back and forth across the continent. Hanks does his best to convince us that Gump is, in fact, a character and not merely a bulging sack of virtues, but the movie takes the fight out of him. With Sally Field and Gary Sinise. Directed by Robert Zemeckis.—A.L. (7/25/94) (Gemini, Art Greenwich Twin, Chelsea Cinemas, and Columbus Circle.)

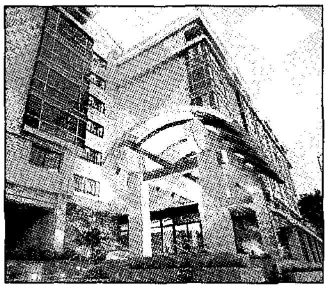
A Great Day in Harlem—A funny, moving, altogether miraculous documentary about how fifty-eight famous, near-famous, and not yet famous jazz musicians came to be photographed by Art Kane for *Esquire* in front of a brownstone on East 126th Street one morning in August of 1958. The movie, just under an hour long, is a mercurial mix of brief interviews with Kane (who died in February) and with musicians and bystanders who were at the shoot (only a dozen or so survive); alternate exposures (Kane took a hundred and twenty); various stills; an 8-mm. movie taken by Milt Hinton's wife, Mona; and sequences from the brilliant "Sound of Jazz" television special, which had aired just six months earlier and included many of the same musicians. On the same bill is Gjon Mili's classic—and pardonably arty—1944 jazz short, "Jammin' the Blues."—W.B. (Reviewed in the Jazz column, 1/23/95.) (Quad Cinema.)

Hideaway—After a car crash, Jeff Goldblum is pronounced "deader than Elvis," but a mysteriously omnipotent doctor (Alfred Molina) brings him back. The problem is that his mind is now crossed, like a bad phone connection, with that of the doctor's first rescuee—a young Satan-worshipping killer who used to be called Jeremy but has adopted the ridiculous name of Vassago. Somebody must have seen the prospect of a hit in Alicia Silverstone (the late-pubescent blonde famous for her appearance in an Aerosmith video), who plays Goldblum's daughter, screaming for help. But this movie lacks even the faintest campy delight (although Vassago, who is clearly supposed to be a stud, does call to mind a teen-age Fran Leibowitz). With Christine Lahti as Goldblum's nonplussed wife. Written by Andrew Kevin Walker and Neal Jimenez; based on the novel by Dean R. Koontz. Directed by Brett Leonard.—S.K. (Movieland 8th Street Triplex, Murray Hill Cinemas, Manhattan Twin, First & 62nd Cinemas, Orpheum VII, Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, and Criterion Center.)

The Hunted—Christopher Lambert is a businessman in Japan who finds himself pursued by an assassin (John Lone) after he witnesses the murder of a young woman (Joan Chen). Written and directed by Jonathan Lawton. (Park & 86th Street Cinemas, Chelsea Cinemas, and National Twin.)

I Am Cuba—The Georgian director Mikhail Kalatozov's 1964 portrait of the island nation during the Batista era was a landmark of Soviet-Cuban coöperation. It features a cast of peasants, students, and intellectuals,

The Right Decision.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PROJECTIONS

Perfect Pairing

IN 1938, the director and producer Alexander Korda introduced a Hungarian emigré named Emeric Pressburger to Michael Powell, a tall young Englishman who dressed as though he were on the ski slopes, and suggested that they work together. Released the next year, their first film, "The Spy in Black," did brisk business, despite the circumstance that its hero, played by Conrad Veidt, was a German U-boat captain. It was the first of eighteen Powell-Pressburger collaborations, a creative double act so freakishly well tuned that Powell would later describe it as "marriage without sex." Neither man quite fitted into the British film world, let alone into the British establishment. Powell was the high romantic unabashed by excess, an embarrassment, at times, to stolid homegrown tastes; Pressburger, compact in frame and thought, was the Jewish storyteller.

Starting on March 17, Film Forum will show all eighteen films in new prints (which is important: you wouldn't want "The Red Shoes" to turn up scuffed). The partnership was, above all, an adventure in style. After "The Spy in Black," Powell and Pressburger refined their mastery of the monochrome thriller with "49th Parallel" and "The Small Back Room," but even the prescient Korda could not have foreseen that his introduction would lead to the ravishing blooms of "A Matter of Life and Death" and "Black Narcissus." It was as if Fritz Lang had mutated into Max Ophuls. For a good stylistic halfway point, try the double bill of "A Canterbury Tale" and "I Know Where I'm Going," on April 5 and 6. These bright, windblown pictures shift imperceptibly into robust mysticism; the strangeness comes not from flight but from an ever more rooted sense of place. Here was something new in movies: the intrigue of exploring what you know well, or what you thought you knew. It produced "The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp," which may be the greatest English film ever made, not least because it looks so closely at the incurable condition of being English. "Colonel Blimp" is at once passionate and aloof, languid and wound-up, laughable and forlorn—essential Powell and Pressburger.

—ANTHONY LANE

CURRENT FILMS—Cont'd

as well as professional actors. Two poets, Yevgeny Yevtushenko and Enrique Pineda Barnet, wrote the screenplay. In Spanish, Russian, and English. (Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema.) (Film Forum.)

Immortal Beloved—Bernard Rose's new biography of Beethoven (Gary Oldman) filters our view of the musician through the composer's secretary, Anton Schindler (Jeroen Krabbé, who looks more like Beethoven than Oldman does). But the film is flat. Only once does it aim high, in a great kitsch-cosmic shot of the infant genius lost in a sea of stars. Valeria Golino, Isabella Rossellini, and the admirable Johanna Ter Steege play the three main women in Beethoven's life—the nominations for Best Supporting Muse. There's no surprise in the winner, nor in the choice of music—a roster of greatest hits.—A.L. (Plaza and Lincoln Square.)

Just Cause—Sean Connery is an icy Harvard law professor and capital-punishment opponent drafted to spring Blair Underwood from death row, and Laurence Fishburne is the corrupt small-town policeman in his way. Two or three times, the actors trick you into thinking that this thriller means to grapple with white liberal guilt, but the director, Arne Glimcher, quickly chucks the dilemma they've set up. The replacement: a ridiculous racist revenge plot climaxing in an alligator-ridden swamp in the Everglades. Among the many garish stereotypes here is Ed Harris, in a cheeseball performance as a white-trash Hannibal Lecter. Screenplay by Jeb Stuart and Peter Stone, based on the novel by John Katzenbach.—S.K. (Village Theatre VII, Murray Hill Cinemas, Gemini, Orpheum VII, Chelsea Cinemas, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema, and Criterion Center.)

Little Women—Gillian Armstrong's movie is more naturalistic—less storybooklike—than the previous screen versions of Louisa May Alcott's novel about a poor but noble New England family in the eighteen-sixties. In this rendering, the Marches—mother, father (mostly absent), and four daughters—inhabit a coherent, fully realized world. Winona Ryder, as the aspiring writer Jo, gives a luminous performance. Also with Susan Sarandon, Trini Alvarado, Claire Danes, Kirsten Dunst, Samantha Mathis, Christian Bale, Gabriel Byrne, and Mary Wickes.—T.R. (1/9/95) (Chelsea Cinemas and Cinema 3.)

The Madness of King George—Alan Bennett's stage play has moved to the screen, with the same star (Nigel Hawthorne), the same director (Nicholas Hytner), and the same story, about the King of England's decline, in the years 1788-89, from cheerful disciplinarian to lewd, unsleeping ranter. It's a fine dramatic predicament—and that's how it stays, never really pressing forward or pulling us into a plot. But there is plenty of relish here—in Ian Holm's fierce turn as a country physician, and in Hawthorne's blend of thundering and whimpers. With Helen Mirren (underused) and Rupert Everett (overweight).—A.L. (1/16/94) (Angelika Film Center, 19th Street East 6, Coronet, and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

The Mangler—A horror movie about malevolent commercial laundry equipment, starring Robert Englund (Freddy Krueger in the "Nightmare on Elm Street" series). Directed by Tobe Hooper; screenplay by Hooper, Stephen Brooks, and Peter Welbeck, from a short story by Stephen King. (Village East Cinemas and Astor Plaza.)

Man of the House—A comedy in which Chevy Chase's advances toward Farrah Fawcett are thwarted by her eleven-year-old son (Jonathan Taylor Thomas). Directed by James Orr, who co-wrote the screenplay with Jim Cruickshank from a story by David Peckinpah and Richard Jeffries. (Village Theatre VII, Sutton, 86th Street East Twin, Chelsea Cinemas, and 84th Street Sixplex. . . . ¶ Embassy 1; through March 16. . . . ¶ Embassy; starting March 17.)

Miami Rhapsody—Gwyn (Sarah Jessica Parker) loves Matt (Gil Bellows)—only she's not sure. Her mom (Mia Farrow) loves a young male nurse (Antonio Banderas)—only she's not sure, either; maybe she really loves Gwyn's dad (Paul Mazursky). And so forth. David Frankel wrote and directed this comedy, which sounds like a lot of fun but somehow manages to be hardly any fun at all.—A.L. (Village East Cinemas, Cinema I, and Lincoln Square.)

Mina Tannenbaum—Writer-director Martine Dugowson's feature follows a quarter-century-long friendship between two Jewish women (Romane Bohringer and Elsa Zylberstein) in Paris. With Florence Thomassin. In French. (Quad Cinema and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

Muriel's Wedding—An Australian comedy, written and directed by P. J. Hogan, about a young woman from the suburbs (Toni Collette) who moves to Sydney to find a husband. With Rachel Griffiths and Bill Hunter. (Village East Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, Beekman, and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

Nobody's Fool—Paul Newman plays Sully, a divorced, erratically employed construction worker in a dingy upstate New York town. Robert Benton's movie (based on a novel by Richard Russo) is essentially a series of low-key comic vignettes in which the hero tries to deal with the exasperating presence of other people: irritable neighbors, demanding friends, disappointed family members. Not much happens, but the picture bobs along amiably to the rhythm of Newman's dry, deeply funny performance, and the tiny pleasures accumulate like the snow that covers the town. The terrific supporting cast includes Bruce Willis, Melanie Griffith, Jessica Tandy, and Gene Saks.—T.R. (Movieland 8th Street Triplex, 23rd St. West Triplex, Columbus Circle, and Olympia.)

Once Were Warriors—Jake (Temuera Morrison) says he loves Beth (Rena Owen), which seems to involve getting drunk and thumping her, with frequent interludes for swearing and sex. Beth swears back with double the venom, but gradually admits to herself that it's time she took the children and got out of the house. Lee Tamahori's début picture marks the first attempt in New Zealand cinema to confront the quandaries of modern Maori life. It's a strong subject, but the film is packed so tight with the importance of its mission that it leaves all subtlety behind—it rants at the audience with the same blind fury that powers most of the characters. The relentlessness winds you up and sends you nowhere.—A.L. (Angelika Film Center and Paris.)

Outbreak—Wolfgang Petersen directed this thriller, in which Dustin Hoffman and Rene Russo are doctors out to rescue a small California town—and the rest of the world—from a lethal virus. (Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema.) (Village Theatre VII, 19th Street East 6, 34th Street Showplace, New York Twin, Orpheum VII, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema, and Criterion Center.)

Pulp Fiction—In Quentin Tarantino's celebrated picture, John Travolta, Samuel L. Jackson, Uma Thurman, Tim Roth, Harvey Keitel, Christopher Walken, and Bruce Willis parade through two and a half hours of complicated, cross-weaving Los Angeles plots, some of which are more gripping than others; the talk is dirty and funny, the violence always waiting just around the corner. It's a bright and startling picture, but the next day, it seems like a dream: the film attacks your senses and gives you almost nothing to remember it by, let alone to nourish you.—A.L. (10/10/94) (Village East Cinemas, Murray Hill Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, 86th Street East Twin, Chelsea Cinemas, 57th Street Playhouse, 84th Street Sixplex, and Embassy.)

The Quick and the Dead—A flashy, vacuous, and enjoyable helping of Old West hokum written by Simon Moore and directed by Sam Raimi. In the dead-end town of Redemption, nobody does anything much except pick fights and pay taxes to the local boss, a nasty piece of work named Herod (Gene Hackman). In rides the taciturn challenger, played by Sharon Stone. As in "The Specialist," she has a childhood horror to erase, which seems unnecessary—why do screenwriters think that Stone needs an *excuse* to make life hell for men? The film has no real suspense (it's pretty obvious who is set to win), but it goes ahead and whips up the nervous tension anyhow. The shock closeups and camera pans—fast as a speeding bullet, that kind of thing—are cheerfully over the top, though it's sad that the most venerable of movie genres has dwindled into a hatful of Sergio Leone rip-offs. With Leonardo DiCaprio, whose grin does a lot for the picture's cocky mood.—A.L. (3/13/95) (National Twin.)

Quiz Show—Robert Redford's movie is a speedy, absorbing chronicle of a trivial show-business scandal of the fifties: the rigging of big-money quiz shows. The screenplay, by Paul Attanasio, tries hard to sell some sweeping ideas about the class dynamics of American society, and doesn't quite succeed. The picture's real strength is its witty, vigorous evocation of the fifties media world. It hums along like a well-constructed farce, and its crazy momentum carries it over the bumps of social significance. Ralph Fiennes, John Turturro, and Rob Morrow have the largest roles, but they're outshone by the supporting players: Paul Scofield, Mira Sorvino, Christopher McDonald, Allan Rich, Hank Azaria, Barry Levinson, and—best of all—David Paymer.—T.R. (9/19/94) (Village East Cinemas, Gemini, 23rd St. West Triplex, and Lincoln Square.)

Red—The last and best film in the trilogy that began with the baffling "Blue" and continued with the more acrid "White"; here all the skills of the director, Krzysztof Kieślowski, are brought into melancholy play. Blind chance or benign fate (according to your point of view) brings Valentine (Irène Jacob), a young model living alone in Geneva, into contact with a retired judge (Jean-Louis Trintignant) with a predilection for eavesdropping on telephone conversations. In time Valentine's repulsion shades into curiosity, and from there into affection. And the movie itself shades from coldness and contrivance into a story as touching and mysterious as anything Kieślowski has ever made. In French.—A.L. (11/28/94) (Quad Cinema. . . . ¶ Gotham Cinema; through March 16.)

Roommates—Peter Falk plays an old man living with the grandson he raised (D. B. Sweeney), who is now a married doctor with a family. With Julianne Moore and Ellen Burstyn. Directed by Peter Yates. Written by Max Apple and Stephen Metcalfe, from Apple's 1994 memoir. (Village East Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, Murray Hill Cinemas, Cinema II, Orpheum VII, Guild, and Lincoln Square.)

Sankofa—A model (Oyafunmike Ogunlano) on a photo shoot in West Africa is hurled back in time to the era of slavery, in a film written and directed by Haile Gerima. (Thalia.)

The Secret of Roan Inish—John Sayles' fable about a mythological Celtic creature, the Selkie (half seal, half human), and its effect on an Irish family unfolds as a tall tale, and it offers the pleasures of a magical story told in mysterious tones. The movie begins as a rousing sea adventure, then turns into a home-and-hearth mood piece; what saves it from being cloying is an almost total lack of drama. The rhythms are placid and the camera work (by Haskell Wexler) is simple and unfussy. The film's a charm.—B.D. (Angelika Film Center, East-side Cinema, and Lincoln Square.)

Shallow Grave—Kerry Fox, Ewan McGregor, and Christopher Eccleston are three Edinburgh roommates confronted by the corpse of their new lodger and the stash of drug money that he has left behind. They bury the body and keep the cash; greed and paranoia soon kick in; and the plot, smartly worked out by screenwriter John Hodge, marches toward its climax. Not that you care too much how it ends up or what happens to these people—the film is less a thriller than a frosty exercise in logic. But the director, Danny Boyle, does wonders with a small budget, and the suave, dense-hued look of his movie stays with you long after the horror has evaporated.—A.L. (2/13/95) (Village Theatre VII, New York Twin, and Lincoln Square.)

The Shawshank Redemption—Tim Robbins returns to his best form with his haunted, cunning portrayal of Andy Dufresne, a young banker sentenced to life imprisonment in the nineteen-forties. Frank Darabont's movie never grabs at you, preferring to work patiently on your sympathies and nerves while finding time for casual jokes. What at first seems like a plotless tale of companionship—principally between Andy and a fixer named Red (Morgan Freeman)—tightens into excitement. The picture stays on track and leaves you, appropriately enough, with a surging sense of release.—A.L. (9/26/94) (34th Street Showplace, First & 62nd Cinemas, Orpheum VII, Art Greenwich Twin, Chelsea Cinemas, and Regency.)

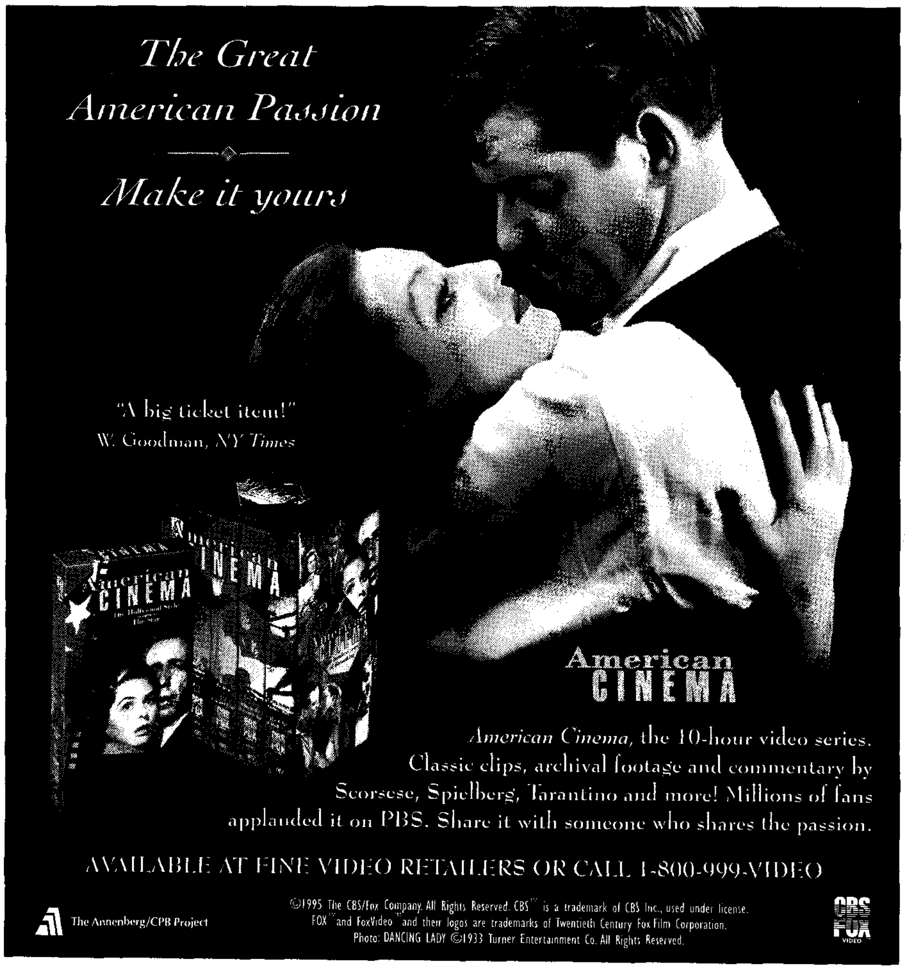
Son of the Shark—In French writer-director Agnès Merlet's first feature, two homeless teen-age brothers (Ludovic Vandendaele and Erick Da Silva) wreak havoc on a small town on the northern coast. With Sandrine Blancke. In French. (Village East Cinemas and Angelika 57.)

Strawberry and Chocolate—The Cuban director Tomás Gutiérrez Alea charts the efforts of Diego (Jorge Perugorria), a gay artist, to seduce David (Vladimir Cruz), a straight and, frankly, rather boring student. It's a daring movie to have come out of Cuba, although Gutiérrez Alea's grasp of the radical temperament may seem unsophisticated to audiences here. Diego kicks out against government restrictions, David lives quietly within them; wouldn't it have been more intriguing the other way around? Co-directed by Juan Carlos Tabío. In Spanish.—A.L. (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

The Sum of Us—David Stevens has adapted his play, about an Australian widower (Jack Thompson) and his gay son (Russell Crowe), for the screen. With John Polson and Deborah Kennedy. Directed by Kevin Dowling (who also directed the 1990 Off Broadway production) and Geoff Burton. (Village Theatre VII and Carnegie Hall Cinema.)

Tom and Viv—Willem Dafoe plays the young T. S. Eliot with a curious Boer accent and a look on his face that suggests he would be happier back in the jungles of "Platoon." As Vivienne, Eliot's distressed first wife, Miranda Richardson gives such an overloaded performance that the simple drinking of a cup of tea becomes unwatchable. (If Vivienne really did behave like this, no wonder Eliot was in despair.) The movie regards the poet as a chilly repressive who locked away first his feelings and then—by extension—his wife. Those who think that poetry is a waste product of neurosis will have a lovely time. Brian Gilbert directs, heavily; the screenplay is by Michael Hastings (who wrote the original play) and Adrian Hodges.—A.L. (12/12/94) (Cinema 3rd Avenue.)

Vanya on 42nd Street—Louis Malle's astonishingly beautiful film documents a stage production, directed by André Gregory, of Chekhov's "Uncle Vanya." The conceit is that the actors—wearing street clothes and clutching take-out coffee—have gathered for a run-through; as it goes along, our sense of the theatrical reality gives way to the more intimate feeling of belief that movies create. The style of the movie seems, finally, to merge with the play itself: nothing appears to be happening, yet everything is transformed. With Wallace Shawn, as Vanya, and



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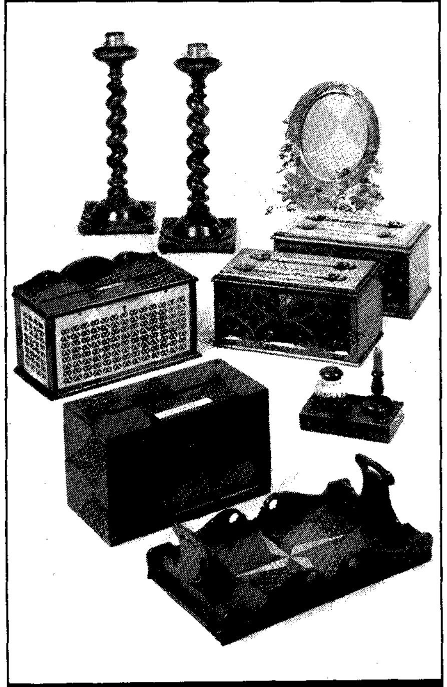

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CURRENT FILMS—Cont'd

Julianne Moore, as Yelena; also with Brooke Smith, Larry Pine, and George Gaynes. The superb adaptation is by David Mamet.—T.R. (10/31/94) (Carnegie Hall Cinema.)

The Walking Dead—Four African-American marines (Allen Payne, Eddie Griffin, Joe Morton, and Vonte Sweet) fight their way through the jungle during the Vietnam War, in an action film written and directed by Preston A. Whitmore II. (Movieland 8th Street Triplex, Manhattan Twin, 23rd St. West Triplex, and Criterion Center.)

Window to Paris—Yuri Mamin's comic fantasy about St. Petersburg roommates (Serguei Dontsov and Victor Michailov) who discover a window in their apartment that opens onto the City of Light. With Agnes Soral. Written by the director and Arkadi Tigai. In Russian and French. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

THEATRE ADDRESSES

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EAST SIDE

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St. (995-2000).
Little Theatre, Public Theatre, 425 Lafayette St. (598-7171).
Movieland 8th Street Triplex, 36 E. 8th (477-6600).
Village Theatre VII, 3rd Ave. at 11th (982-0400).
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th (924-3363).
Village East Cinemas, 2nd Ave. at 12th (529-6799).
19th Street East 6, B'way at 19th (260-8000).
Murray Hill Cinemas, 160 E. 34th (689-6548).
34th Street Showplace, 238 E. 34th (532-5544).
34th St. East, 241 E. 34th (683-0255).
Eastside Playhouse, 3rd Ave. at 55th (755-3020).
Sutton I and 2, 3rd Ave. at 57th (759-1411).
Gotham Cinema, 3rd Ave. at 58th (759-2262).
Plaza, 42 E. 58th (355-3320).
Manhattan Twin, 3rd Ave. at 59th (935-6420).
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th (759-4630).
Baronet and Coronet, 3rd Ave. at 59th (355-1663).
Cinema I, Cinema II, and Cinema 3rd Avenue, 3rd Ave. at 60th (753-6022).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd (513-5408).
Gemini I and 2, 2nd Ave. at 64th (832-1670).
Beekman, 2nd Ave. at 66th (737-2622).
New York Twin, 2nd Ave. at 67th (744-7339).
68th St. Playhouse, 3rd Ave. at 68th (734-0302).
Tower East, 3rd Ave. at 71st (879-1313).
East 85th Street, 1st Ave. at 85th (249-5100).
Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 125 E. 86th (534-1880).
Orpheum VII, 3rd Ave. at 86th (876-2400).
86th Street East Twin, 3rd Ave. at 86th (249-1144).

WEST SIDE

Film Forum, 209 W. Houston St. (727-8110).
Waverly I and 2, 6th Ave. at 3rd (929-8037).
Art Greenwich Twin, Greenwich Ave. at 12th (929-3350).
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th (255-8800).
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd (513-5402).
23rd St. West Triplex, 333 W. 23rd (989-0060).
Guild, 33 W. 50th (757-2406).
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th (765-7600).
57th St. Playhouse, 110 W. 57th (581-7360).
Carnegie Hall Cinemas, 7th Ave. between 56th and 57th (265-2520).
Angelika 57, 225 W. 57th (586-1900).
Paris, 4 W. 58th (980-5656).
Cinema 3, 2 W. 59th (752-5959).
Columbus Circle, B'way at 61st (247-5070).
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd (265-7466).
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, B'way at 63rd (757-2280).
Regency, B'way at 67th (724-3700).
Lincoln Square, B'way at 68th (336-5000).
84th Street Sixplex, B'way at 84th (877-3600).
Thalia, B'way at 95th (316-4962).
Metro Cinema I and 2, B'way at 99th (222-1200).
Olympia I and II, B'way at 107th (865-8128).

TIMES SQUARE AREA

Criterion Center, B'way at 44th (354-0900).
Embassy I, B'way at 46th (302-0494).
Embassy 2, 3, and 4, 7th Ave. at 47th (730-7262).
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at B'way (869-8340).
National Twin, B'way at 44th (869-0950).

REVIVALS

(The following notes are by Pauline Kael, Terrence Rafferty, and Michael Sragow. Theatre addresses and phone numbers appear with the listings following these notes.)

The Ballad of Cable Hogue (1970)—Sam Peckinpah is in a relaxed and playful mood in this rambling comedy-Western with Jason Robards (in fine form) as a desert rat who discovers a mudhole and turns water merchant, Stella Stevens as an ambitious whore, and David Warner as a lecherous self-ordained preacher. The picture needs more invention, more variety; it's a little too pleased with itself, and shots are held too long. Also with Strother Martin, L. Q. Jones, Slim Pickens, Kathleen Freeman, Gene Evans, Peter Whitney, R. G. Armstrong, and Max Evans.—P.K. (Walter Reade Theatre; March 17.)

Junior Bonner (1972)—Sam Peckinpah guided Steve McQueen to his most subtle and moving performance, as a kicked-in-the-ribs rodeo star pushing past his prime who wants to patch family ties as well as ride bulls, rope calves, and milk wild cows. McQueen acts out faded glory without self-pity or preening; he displays just enough of his character's former vanity and power to make his current pain and failure sting. When he bandages up his midsection, he seems to be struggling physically to repair his pride. He's matched by Robert Preston and Ida Lupino as Junior's estranged parents, and Joe Don Baker as his real-estate-developer brother, brimming with down-home smarm.—M.S. (Walter Reade Theatre; March 19 and 21.)

Last Tango in Paris (1972)—Exploitation films had been supplying mechanized sex—sex as physical stimulation but without passion or emotional violence. Then, in this film, Bernardo Bertolucci used sex to express the characters' drives. Marlon Brando, as the aging American, Paul, is working out his aggression on the young bourgeois French girl, Jeanne (Maria Schneider), and the physical menace of sexuality that is emotionally charged is such a departure from everything that audiences had come to expect at the movies that the film created a sensation. It's a bold and imaginative work—a great work. When Brando improvises within Bertolucci's structure, his full art is realized; his performance is intuitive, rapt, princely. Working with Brando, Bertolucci achieves realism with the terror of actual experience still alive on the screen. Cinematography by Vittorio Storaro; music by Gato Barbieri. In French and English.—P.K. (Little Theatre.)

Mamma Roma (1962)—In Pier Paolo Pasolini's over-conceptualized second film, Anna Magnani (who else?) plays Mamma Roma, a former prostitute with a heart as big, and goals as confused, as the whole Eternal City. Pasolini both admires and questions the woman's determination to push her teenage son into the middle class: she puts her street smarts at the service of false values. The director's Marxist-Catholic imagery reaches its heavy-handed nadir when, in prison, the son is strapped to the *letto di contenzione* ("punishment bed"). As photographed by the great Tonino Delli Colli, it makes for one fancy crucifixion. In Italian.—M.S. (Film Forum 3.)

The Wild Bunch (1969)—Sam Peckinpah's Western epic—perhaps the greatest American movie—is a brilliant, suspenseful action picture about a band of outlaws on the run in south Texas and Mexico in the days before the First World War. It has been restored to its full two-hour-and-twenty-five-minute length, and the restored scenes—mostly flashbacks to painful moments in the life of the gang's leader, Pike Bishop (William Holden)—deepen and complicate the viewer's responses to the film's violent set pieces. The voluptuous carnage in the opening shoot-out and in the climactic massacre is more disturbing than ever, because it's now tinged with the melancholy of an aging killer. The complete film makes clear that this was always meant to be Pike's story: a portrait of a Western survivor who becomes, in the end, an artist of death. The superb supporting cast includes Robert Ryan, Ernest Borgnine, Ben Johnson, Warren Oates, Jaime Sanchez, Edmond O'Brien, and Emilio Fernandez. The screenplay is by Peckinpah and Walon Green. The editing, by Lou Lombardo, and the cinematography, by Lucien Ballard, are extraordinary.—T.R. (3/6/95) (Lincoln Square.)

LATE RUNS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Worldwide Cinemas, 50th St. between Eighth and Ninth Aves. (246-1583)—"Junior" (Ivan Reitman). . . . "Interview with the Vampire" (Neil Jordan). . . . "To Live" (Zhang Yimou, in Mandarin). . . . "Death and the Maiden" (Roman Polanski). . . . "Safe Passage" (Robert Allan Ackerman). . . . "Nell" (Michael Apted).

Film Forum 2 and 3, 209 W. Houston St. (727-8110)—**theatre 2:** Through March 16: "The Cameraman" (1928, Edward Sedgwick) and "Spite Marriage" (1929, Sedgwick), both with Buster Keaton. . . . ¶ A program of films by the team of Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger. March 17-20: "Black Narcissus" (1947). . . .From March 21: "The Spy in Black" (1939) and "Contraband" (1940). . . . **theatre 3:** "Faster, Pussycat! Kill! Kill!" (1965, Russ Meyer) and "Mamma Roma" (†).

Little Theatre, Public Theatre, 425 Lafayette St. (598-1717)—"Last Tango in Paris" (†).

Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (924-3363)—Through March 16: "Super 8 ½" (Bruce La Bruce). . . . ¶ From March 17: "Naked Killer" (Clarence Fok; in Cantonese).

New Directors/New Films—The first programs in a sixteen-day festival of international films. March 17 at 6 and March 18 at 3: "Living in Oblivion" (Tom DiCillo, United States). . . . ¶ March 17 at 9 and March 18 at 12:30: "Red Firecracker, Green Firecracker" (He Ping, China). . . . ¶ March 18 at 6 and March 19 at 3:30: "Coming to Terms" (Pascale Ferran, France). . . . ¶ March 18 at 9 and March 19 at 12:30: "Bandit Queen" (Shekhar Kapur, India). . . . ¶ March 19 at 6:30 and March 20 at 9: "The Devil Never Sleeps" (Lourdes Portillo, United States and Mexico). . . . ¶ March 19 at 9 and March 20 at 6: "Cross My Heart and Hope to Die" (Marius Holst, Norway). . . . ¶ March 21 at 6: "Art for Teachers of Children" (Jennifer Montgomery, United States). . . . ¶ March 21 at 9: "Postman" (He Jianjun, China). (Museum of Modern Art, Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. For information, call 875-5610.)

Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center, 165 W. 65th St., plaza level (875-5600)—A retrospective of the television and film works of Sam Peckinpah. March 16 at 2 and 6:45: "Major Dundee" (1964). . . . March 16 at 4:30: Four episodes of "The Westerner," the 1960 television series, starring Brian Keith and directed by Peckinpah. . . . March 17 at 2 and 6:45: Two episodes of "Dick Powell Theater," the 1962 television series directed by Peckinpah. . . . March 17 at 4:15 and 8:30: "The Ballad of Cable Hogue" (†). . . . March 18 at 4 and 8: Two episodes of "Zane Grey Theater," a television series directed by Peckinpah. . . . March 18 at 5:45 and 9:45, March 19 at 4 and 8:15, and March 20 at 2: "Straw Dogs" (1971). . . . March 19 at 6:15 and March 21 at 2: "Junior Bonner" (†). . . . March 21 at 4: "The Getaway" (1972). . . . ¶ March 18-19 at 2: "Warlords of Atlantis" (1978, Kevin Connor), with Doug McClure.

American Museum of the Moving Image, 35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (1-718 784-0077)—A program of films by Atom Egoyan. March 18 at 2: "The Adjuster" (1991). . . . March 18 at 4:30: "In This Corner" (1985) and "Open House" (1982). . . . March 19 at 2: "Gross Misconduct: The Life of Brian Spencer" (1992). . . . March 19 at 4: "Calendar" (1993) and "En Passant (Passing Through)" (1992).

A Different Light Bookstore, 151 W. 19th St. (989-4850)—A Sunday-night series of free films (and popcorn). On March 19 at 7, the feature will be Vincente Minnelli's "Tea and Sympathy" (1956), with Deborah Kerr and John Kerr.

Brooklyn Museum, 200 Eastern Parkway (1-718 638-5000)—A program of recent Italian films. March 18 at 2: "The Red Dove" (1989, Nanni Moretti). . . . ¶ March 18 at 7: "Libera" (1993, Pappi Corsicato). . . . ¶ March 19 at 2: "The Soul Divided in Two" (1992, Silvio Soldini).

Anthology Film Archives, 32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (505-5181)—March 15 at 7 and March 16 at 8:30: "The Italian" (1915, Reginald Barker; silent) and a selection of short films. . . . ¶ March 15 at 9:30 and March 16 at 7: Short films by Mary Ellen Bate, Lewis Jacobs, Fernand Leger, and Christopher MacLaine. . . . ¶ March 17-19 at 8 and 10: "Jonas in the Desert, Part One" (1995, Peter Sempel). . . . ¶ March 17 at 8:30, March 18 at 8, and March 19 at 2:30: "Young Winston" (1972, Richard Attenborough). . . . ¶ March 18 at 4: "Visual Diary of Yasunori Yamamoto" (1986-95). . . . ¶ March 19 at 7: Films by Jean Cocteau, Douglass Crockwell, and Maya Deren.

JULIAN ALLEN

At the Little Theatre, Marlon Brando and Maria Schneider in Bernardo Bertolucci's "Last Tango in Paris."

THE BOFFINS BAFFLED

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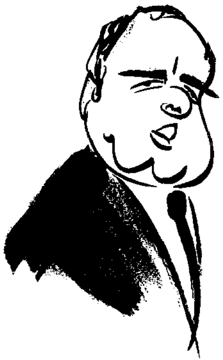
THE NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

IN QUEENS, A KING AND HIS COURTIERS



Last week, a day after watching Governor Pataki sign the death-penalty bill into law, Anthony Seminerio, the Democratic state assemblyman from Queens (Ozone Park, Richmond Hill, Glendale, etc.) and a co-sponsor of the bill, drove his Ford Crown Victoria in the pouring rain from Albany to Queens, where, at the La Bella Vita restaurant and catering hall, on Rockaway Boulevard, his election committee was giving its annual fund-raising dinner for him. In the state legislature, Seminerio—sixty, a former corrections officer, very friendly, very popular, very ample in girth—is given to saluting his colleagues (Democrats, Republicans, and Conservatives alike) on both cheeks with kisses. In Queens, where he maintains two district offices, with coffee and doughnuts available throughout the day and evening to all who enter, and where, he says, "when someone walks in off the street he's treated the same like if I knew him for twenty years," he is called "our most beloved assemblyman." In his assembly district of the past seventeen years, the thirty-eighth, everybody refers to him as Tony, and nobody ever assumes you might possibly be talking about any of the thousands of other Tonys in the neighborhood.

In La Bella Vita, with the dinner scheduled to start at six, Tony was there half an hour early. His campaign treasurer, Arlene Pedone—cheerful, energetic, hoarse-voiced, eyeglassed, earringed, with freshly coiffed graying brown hair—sat at the entrance table, opposite mirrors on a red brick wall and facing one stairway leading up and another one down to the rooms of the dinner. Arlene was assisted by a couple of duplicates of herself with lists in hand for checking off the names of arrivals. Even as the constituents opened their mouths to announce to Tony their names and their organizations, Tony was hugging every man and every woman and kissing each one on both cheeks. Arlene was accepting happily presented checks ("No cash. Never give us cash") for tickets at a hundred and twenty-five dollars each. The constituents crowded in, many of them also ample in girth and wearing shiny suits, walking in a rocking, sidewise gait, as though stepping, football-training style, amid tires.

"This is party time!" Tony said exuberantly. "Everybody's coming! Three hundred and seventy people are coming to pay their respects! The Corrections Captains Association! The Jamaica Hospital Medical Center. The New York Transit P.B.A. The Continental Post of the American Legion! The Forest Park Jewish Center! The Knights of Pythias! Judges! Retired judges! Ex-district leaders! Only, my wife had to stay home with the flu. But they're all here, my son, two daughters, my son-in-law, my other son-in-law, my brothers, my sisters, my Aunt Betty, my granddaughter, four months old!" To the president of the Sergeants Benevolent Association he said, "Go upstairs and hold my four-month-old granddaughter. She'll love you."

The president of the Sergeants Benevolent Association put a stack of printed "courtesy cards" on the reception table, and Arlene presented them to constituents. If you show this card to policemen, "they'll be nice to you," she said.

Upstairs, the constituents visited the bar, attacked giant tureens of spaghetti, penne, mussels, meatballs, beef stew, eggplant parmigiana, and salad, and listened to someone bang out "I've Got You Under My Skin" on an electronic keyboard. Downstairs, a guitar-and-male-singer duo called the 2 Tones were rendering the theme from "The Godfather." Tony found his granddaughter, wearing a white dress and a white tiara, to be placid and uncomplaining and politically coöperative as he handed her around from one constituent to another.

"Here," he said, passing her to a young man. "Give her to Mario Biaggi. Let Mr. Biaggi hold her."

"Tony, where's Giuliani?" someone asked.

"He had a function, otherwise he'd a been here," Tony said. "He worked for me in the election when I needed him. I worked for him, he worked for me."

"Tony's people cut across all lines," Arlene said.

"Tony!" someone said. "I hear you had a rough session. An all-nighter."

"Only till four-thirty in the morning. It was nothing," Tony said. It was the evening's only reference—and an oblique one, at that—to the passage of the death-penalty bill.

"We don't have to talk about it," Arlene said. "Everyone knows Tony is reflecting the will of his constituents."

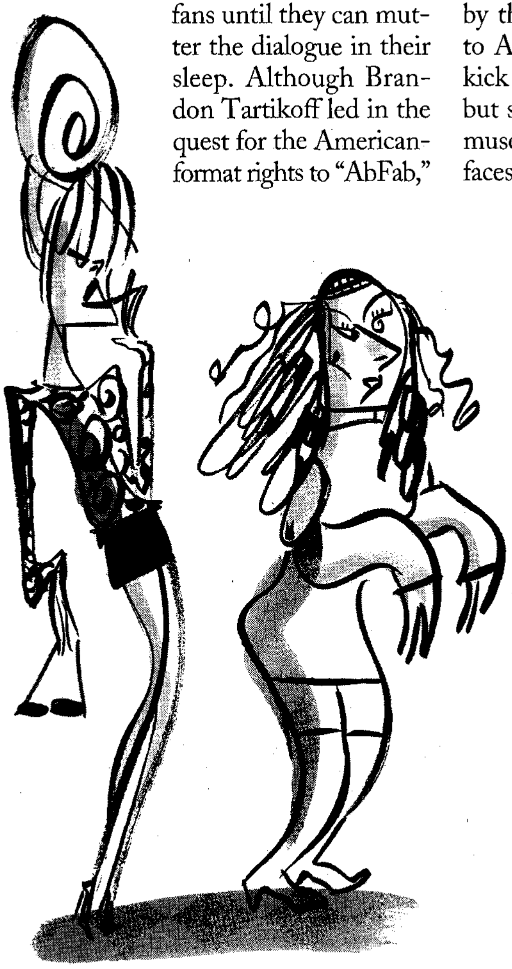
Then Tony took the microphone from the electronic-keyboard man and addressed his constituents. "Without you lovely people, there's no Tony Seminerio," he said. "Now I'm gonna sing." And he did. He sang "Heart of My Heart."

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

AN ABSOLUTELY FABULOUS FINALE

In a BBC studio overlooking a laundry-gray London skyline, the cast of the comedy series "Absolutely Fabulous" is rehearsing an episode entitled "Sex." On the sofa, Edina (Jennifer Saunders, the show's creator) is explaining to her pal Patsy (Joanna Lumley) how in her feminist heyday she spent a week celebrating her vagina—making artistic molds of it, singing to it, taking it out for three-course meals—all in vain. "I'm not like you, darling," she says to Patsy. "I'm not a *vessel* to be *filled*." In the kitchen, Edina's daughter, Saffron (Julia Sawalha), is sitting with her school chums. As the actors move from room to room, they're tailed by a camera crew from CBS's "60 Minutes," which is taping a segment about the show—the penultimate episode to be shot for the series.

A smash in England, "Absolutely Fabulous"—"AbFab," for short—has also become a cult item in America, where cable's Comedy Central replays the same few episodes over and over again, brainwashing its fans until they can mutter the dialogue in their sleep. Although Brandon Tartikoff led in the quest for the American-format rights to "AbFab," they were captured by Roseanne—a gutsy move that has nevertheless dismayed AbFans on the Internet, who feel that any American version will err on the side of vanilla. After all, the appeal of "AbFab" is that it backhands every pious face of P.C. Like the early satires of Evelyn Waugh, the show doesn't allow cozy warmth to dilute its cold, brittle attack; the characters never hug at the end to show they care. Hurtling toward menopause, Eddy and Patsy still behave like groupies with permanent backstage passes. They snort coke, swig liquor, smoke, tumble out of taxis, pass out on lawns. Their wardrobes, in the manner of an FM station playing the hits of the seventies, eighties, and nineties, blend the worst of the last three decades into one hideous aesthetic statement. Eddy and Patsy, with their diva attitudes and outlandish insincerities (air kisses and endless "sweetie-darling"s), have become the biggest camp icons since Krystle and Alexis duked it out on "Dynasty."



After the morning rehearsal, the cast members adjourn to the BBC cafeteria. Saunders and Lumley take a table by the window. Lumley is best known to American audiences as Steed's sidekick Purdey on "The New Avengers," but she has now emerged as a peroxide muse among the literati. Her name surfaces in Anthony Powell's just published journals; in a recent London *Spectator* column, Nigel Nicolson recounts the time he thought to impress John Updike by inviting Lumley to dine with them—a meeting of minds that might have fizzled had Lumley not employed all her charms. As a comic actress, Lumley's triumph is that she's a beautiful woman who doesn't mind looking bats: her Patsy is a Gerald Scarfe caricature come to life—a man-devourer with enlarged pores, the engraved flinch of a bad face-lift, and Ivana Trump skyscraper hair.

Next to her, Saunders is fidgety. She's round and hard, a beach ball burdened with thought. There is still more writing to be done, more rehearsing. As half of the comedy team French and Saunders, she spun "AbFab" off from a sketch on their show. She doesn't regard every episode of "AbFab" as a pearl; the first season was "shabby," she says. But now that the show has found itself, she wants to apply the brakes before she suffers burnout—she doesn't want to end up imitating herself. Speaking of imitation, pieces of "AbFab" have already shown up on American sitcoms—for example, Christine Baranski's ditzy character on "Cybill." Saunders is amused-annoyed. "They think that drinking and drug-taking are what the show's about—that it's all about excess. Roseanne was the first to snap to the fact that 'AbFab' is a mother-daughter show."

Yes, indeedy doody: a mother-daughter show in which the daughter mothers her mother. Saffron, behind prim schoolgirl glasses, is calm, brisk, nurselike, yet stewing with anger over the youth that was taken from her. She snaps at her slatternly mother, mocks her weight, bosses her around. Discussing the difficulties between mother and daughter, Saunders and Lumley slide into their characters' voices. "She's torturing me," Saunders says to Lumley with a slight moan.

"She is, darling."

"She's leeching away my life. She won't leave, she won't dress up or make herself pretty, she won't go out on dates."

"She's torturing you, darling."

Edina and Patsy are similarly enmeshed. Saunders says, "It's more than a friendship. They're a support system. Without each other, they're dysfunctional. They're useless."

"Pathetic," Lumley says, offering a synonym.

The real excitement in the studio is the word that Cher is going to attend tonight's taping. Cher! Of whom there are few more fabulous! But the episode doesn't need the additional buzz. "Sex" features a flashback orgy scene with Edina slumped in a corner (the only one at the party not getting any), slapstick gags involving condoms, skin mags, and porn videos. Aside from a few minor flubs, the taping goes fine. The dramatic highlight is when Saffron scolds Eddy and Patsy in a scorching monologue worthy of the late John Osborne, slagging off Patsy as "a moldering cadaver." The cast take their bows to huge applause.

Audience members linger, delaying their leave. Part of it is that they're watching the set being struck; part of it is the hope that Cher will pop by. It begins to get cold on the set. Time to go.

This sense of finality is fleeting. The taping may be done, but the afterlife has just begun. The last cycle of new episodes will be shown on Comedy Central in June, with lots of fanfare. The network is hoping to lure Saunders and Lumley to New York to do some high-visibility voguing during Fashion Week. When Saunders isn't involved in the editing of the final British episodes, she is consulting in Los Angeles with Roseanne on the American "AbFab." The latest inside rumor is that Kirstie Alley is reading for the role of Edina. Which makes sense. She has hair big enough to cover her face, and she proved on "Cheers" that she knows how to carouse.

WHO'S THAT GUY?

NEVER mind whodunnit. The real question in the O. J. Simpson double-murder case is this: Who's that guy in the uniform sitting behind those strange-looking clear-plastic panels in Judge Ito's courtroom? In the never-varying shot of the courtroom-pool camera, the two panels jut out from the wall just to the left of the defendant and his lead lawyer, Johnnie L. Cochran, Jr. Is the guy translating? Pontificating? Hibernating? The answer is really very simple, according to Judith Romero, a spokeswoman for the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department, which handles security in the Criminal Courts Building. The courtroom is on the ninth floor, she said, which is where all the trials requiring extra security are held, and plastic barriers like these protect the bailiffs in all the ninth-floor trials. "We figure since he's the one with the gun in the courtroom, he's the one who's going to be the target if anyone would try anything," Romero went on. Thus, the bailiff, usually a deputy sheriff named Guy Magnera, sits in bulletproof splendor, while everyone else must trust that the metal detectors—one in the lobby and another by the ninth-floor elevator bank—will keep them safe.

THE HERMITAGE OPENS UP

IN most seasons except the highest, the State Hermitage Museum, in St. Petersburg, is a blissfully quiet house of masterpieces. There is little of the frenetic tourist hustle that is perpetual in the galleries of the Louvre or the Metropolitan: no supershows, no scalped tickets, no twenty-dollar commemorative T-shirts. Afternoons, you might find yourself alone in a room of Rembrandts, your sneakers squeaking on the buffed parquet, your only companion a squat babushka-guard, a woman so fierce and forbidding on her stool in the corner that had she been guarding the gates of the building in 1917 the Bolsheviks would surely have dropped their plans and headed back to the Finland Station.

This spring, the babushkas will have all the commotion they can handle. On March 30th, the Hermitage will open an exhibition of seventy-four Impressionist and Post-Impressionist masterpieces that were lifted from German private collections at the close of the war and have been stored in the Hermitage ever since. For complicated (make that *incomprehensible*) reasons of Cold War politics, the Soviet leadership not only kept the German cache under wraps but also, until recently, forbade anyone to talk or write about it. Mikhail Piotrovsky, the director of the Hermitage, was in town the other day to check on the American edition of the show's catalogue—a stunning book, which Abrams will soon publish as "Hidden Treasures Revealed."

PIOTROVSKY'S father was the director of the museum for twenty-six years; earlier he had helped save its treasures during the Nazis' nine-hundred-day siege of Leningrad. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the younger Piotrovsky took the initiative of proposing the new exhibition, though he is painfully aware that when it closes, in October, a period of intense negotiation will begin in order to decide what should be done with the paintings. "The nationalists in our country, I am afraid, are in the majority, and the current parliament is against even talking about returning anything to the Germans," he said. "To me, the right and moral thing to do would be for Russia to keep some of these things as retribution for the harm the Nazis did to Russian culture, and send the rest back."

Piotrovsky, whose father had never been able to show him these practically unknown Renoirs, Cézannes, and van Goghs, first saw the paintings in 1991. "I called the curator who had the special key to these storage rooms," he said. "We went in. The paintings were kept on wooden racks. In a way, they were privileged paintings, some of them as fresh as if they'd been on the easel the day before. They hadn't endured the process of display, the dust, the light. They hadn't gone through any overcleaning or over-restoration. I saw the famous Degas 'Place de la Concorde,' and it was amazing. Then, there was a Renoir portrait—absolutely stunning! Practically no one had ever seen it before. In a way, it was an experience I am familiar with—the sense of being the first to see something. I am an archeologist, and I remember being in Central Asia in search of frescoes and chipping away some earth and revealing a work of art of fantastically brilliant colors. It's beauty, just magic! Of all the paintings in the exhibition, only two had ever been reproduced in color. In that storage room, I began to feel that I was experiencing what it is like to be a private collector, that sense that only you can see these paintings, that they exist for your pleasure alone. I must admit, it is actually not such a bad feeling. It is only later that you begin to realize how selfish it is."

Piotrovsky leafed through an advance copy of the American catalogue and pointed out some of his favorite paintings, and he promised that any visitor who comes to St. Petersburg to see the real thing will be astounded. But, he said, one must hurry. "History took these pictures out of the realm of our understanding, and for a long time they have not been studied, or even heard about," Piotrovsky said. "They have not yet been, so to say, *consumed* by the public. They are in the same condition they were in a hundred years ago. By showing them to the people now—well, they'll never be so fresh or so bright again. Sometimes I have the criminal thought of holding a few back. But, of course, I just can't do it."

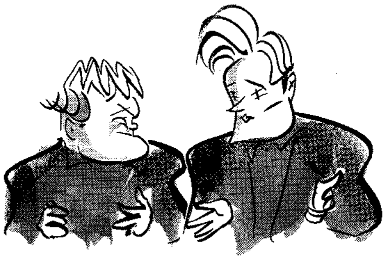
READING HAVANA

In a totalitarian country, the best time to look for world-class writers is often not after the government has been cut down but while it is still in bloom. This thought was expressed in Havana last week by editor Ashbel Green, of Knopf, who had travelled to Cuba with a group of sixty or so American publishing types to look for talent. The lure was an exhibition of American books—the first to take place since Fidel Castro came to power. Despite Cuba's recent "opening," it is still a country where the tenets of the revolution hold sway, and our image of the place, advanced by our government's refusal to do business there and by its government's political record, includes scenes of dissident writers lurking in crumbling circumstances with brilliant unpublished manuscripts locked away in drawers.

The fair was whipped into shape by Roland Algrant of the International Freedom to Publish Committee at the Association of American Publishers, and an oddball collection of heads of houses, acquisitions editors, sales managers, and human-rights activists signed up for the trip. Encouraged by the vagueness of the mission, the group fanned out through the city in search of authentic voices, literary and otherwise. What did they find? The First International Transvestite Festival, for one thing, with drag queens parading onstage dressed as Whitney Houston. Streets lined with American cars predating the 1959 revolution. An American writer who prowls the bars selling his self-published book, "Women Who Moan," for ten dollars a pop.

And E-mail. How closed can a society be that permits unmonitored messages to come in via the Internet? The American visitors came up with no easy answers, and were further stumped when they learned that a well-known dissident writer, Nestor Baguer, who shared cocktails with members of the delegation one evening, was jumped by a thug the following day.

The delegation returned from Havana with piles of would-be books, works that now face the usual hurdles faced by any manuscript that is being considered for publication in our country. In the case of any that pass muster, however, a hopeful publisher could face an additional problem: the bizarre challenge of working out a contract with representatives of a dollar-starved government whose existence this country has never acknowledged.



FUNNY, ISN'T IT?

What is funny? What isn't funny? When is something that's supposed to be funny not funny? Why not? And, most important, what's funny after David Letterman? These were the topics up for discussion last week when the Museum of Television and Radio invited Conan O'Brien, the gangly neophyte talk-show host, and his senior writers to take part in a seminar entitled "Writing for Late-Night Comedy."

O'Brien: I think it's the cheesiness of some of the stuff we do. That's what's really nice about it. We don't have the budget of an eleven-thirty show.

Andy Richter (*sidekick / writer*): When we started out, we used to, like, think up "chat" . . . like, "I'll be disappointed because you didn't remember that . . ."

O'Brien: ". . . my birthday was yesterday."

Richter: And I look at it now and I think, Jesus.

O'Brien: I wish the media hadn't known I went to Harvard. All the speculation was that I'd come out with a pipe, roll up my sleeves, and say, "Welcome to the show. 'Show' comes from the Latin word . . ." I just think things are funny or they aren't.

• •

PRESS FILES

Back when reporters cabled their stories in to the home office, and America's global news came in just two flavors, A.P. and U.P.I., foreign correspondents were a revered, much romanticized group—the Indiana Joneses of journalism. But the live satellite feed has transformed global reportage into a much less rugged endeavor, so these days it's not unusual to see your local news anchor broadcasting from Haiti or from a beach near Mogadishu—in a suit, even.

The Overseas Press Club of America serves as a kind of support group for old-school foreign correspondents. Recently, the club held a reunion here in New York for about fifty of them, mostly retired. After cocktails and some catching up, the guests sat down for a storytelling competition in categories like "most creative expense-account story" and "most repugnant critter ever encountered in the line of duty." The winner of the category titled "most godforsaken place you ever visited for a story" recalled being assigned to write about Babylon, in 1957; when he arrived at the ancient city, he said, he found "a pile of sand." A former correspondent for *Pravda* told the crowd, "The strangest thing I ever witnessed in the United States was the Republican Convention." In keeping with the festive mood, veteran reporters seemed intent on viewing their careers in the best possible light. A man who covers the United Nations for German newspapers offered a cheerful assessment of his beat. "The U.N. is an extraordinary place to work," he said, "because it's so boring."

•

Since the beginning of last week, there's been something oddly naked, subtly incomplete, about the *Times.* It took a day or two to get a fix on the change, but eventually it sank in: the little agate line under the byline on out-of-town stories, "Special to The New York Times," has been brutally and unceremoniously dropped.

How come? Well, according to an assistant managing editor, the idea was to dispose of an anachronism while reclaiming a little of the space lost to other recent innovations, including a slightly larger type size. The line originated as a way of boasting that the *Times* didn't rely on wire services and other purveyors of canned news. In the early decades of this century, it came in several varieties—"By Cable to The New York Times," "By Wireless to The New York Times," even, with quiet pride, "By Telephone to The New York Times." In 1946, all were merged into the now banished "Special to." The freed-up space isn't much, but over time it mounts up, like coins under the couch cushions, to something like fifty columns a year.

In the absence of the "Special to" flourish, the datelines—WASHINGTON, JOHANNESBURG, TRENTON, etc.—look as forlorn as a draftee with a new boot-camp haircut. No doubt we'll all get used to this. But for the moment, reading the *Times* feels a little like leaving home and discovering you forgot to put on your watch. ♦

This week's contributors: Lillian Ross, James Wolcott, Jeffrey Toobin, David Remnick, Suzanne Mantell, Warren St. John, Hendrik Hertzberg.

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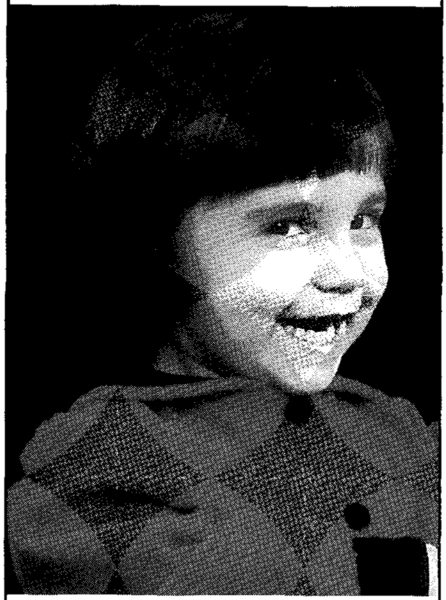

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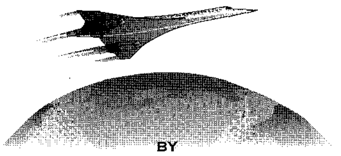

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ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE ARTS

THE GREAT GUSKIN

Neophytes and old pros who aren't quite sure how to get into their next character turn to one man: Harold Guskin.

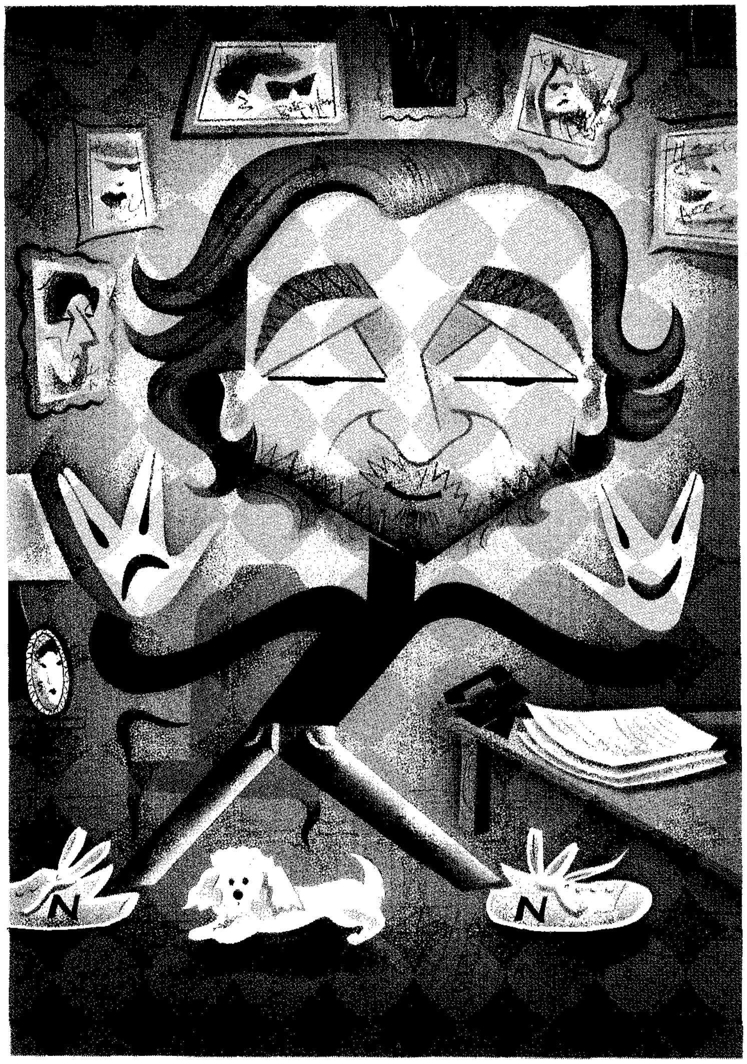
BY JOHN LAHR

THERE are many dreams that afflict actors—dreams of roles, dreams of wealth, dreams of glory—but the most persistent and irresistible dream of actors is the dream of being good. This elusive goal is a destination they set out for in their youth, and spend the rest of their lives trying to reach. Some get there, some get lost along the way, but most are defeated by the long slog in unpromising terrain. (There are 32,833 paid-up members of Actors' Equity, more than a third of whom—12,667, to be exact—live in New York City, and their average salary last year was $12,570.) With or without the luck of talent, actors are always under siege. They need all the help they can get. For some of them, help resides on a cobbled side street in the Village, at an address the phone company has been instructed not to divulge. Here, outside a basement apartment, Kevin Kline, Glenn Close, Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio, Bridget Fonda, Phoebe Cates, Aidan Quinn, Matt Dillon, Michael J. Fox, Michelle Pfeiffer, Blythe Danner, Jennifer Jason Leigh, Andie MacDowell, Bernadette Peters, Jane Fonda, Peter Fonda, Demi Moore, Steve Martin, Natasha Richardson, Liam Neeson, Geena Davis, Candice Bergen, Gregory Hines, Isabella Rossellini, Dianne Wiest, Deborah Harry, and Jon Bon Jovi, to name but a few, have waited patiently at one time or another for a trim, beaky fifty-three-old named Harold Guskin to find his keys, unlock a wrought-iron gate, and warn them to watch their heads (to avoid being brained by the low-slung underside of the stoop steps). Once inside, he ushers them down a hallway—one side of which Guskin calls the Wall of Infamy, and on which the faces of many of them are hung, in framed program covers and photographs—and into the bright clutter of his home, where a shaggy white Maltese called Sophie gums their ankles and bolts around like a toupee on legs.

Why do they come? Candice Bergen came, before the pilot of "Murphy Brown," because she didn't think she was funny. Andie MacDowell came, after "Greystoke," because her career wasn't taking off and she was still a model. Glenn Close came after an unsuccessful audition. "I was so fed up with being terrible at auditioning that I went to him and asked for help," she recalls. (She re-auditioned and got the part.) Bridget Fonda, who began as a strip-ling with Guskin in 1986, continues to come, because she needs a sounding board for her roles. "The way I look at it, I've got this puzzle to put together, and it's really hard," she says. "It's five thousand pieces, and they're all the same color. I've got the outside, because that's the easiest part, and now I'm working on the inside. And who's the genius puzzle master? My friend Harold." Kevin Kline, who now checks in only occasionally, for what he calls a "tune-up," has been with Guskin all his professional life.

Kline's automotive metaphor is apt. Even when actors are waiting for work, which is most of the time, they must keep their theatrical engines running. Voice, body, critical intelligence, imagination—all the equipment of performance—have to be properly souped up. Nowadays, with the declining number of theatrical productions and the increased competition for parts, luck comes to the prepared mind. The great enemy is inactivity. The actor's need for both advantage and growth has brought the acting coach into demand—a kind of personal trainer for the marathon of employment. There is no directory of acting coaches, so it's hard to estimate just how many currently fit the job description. A recent *Village Voice* article on acting coaches calculated, by means of a labyrinthine formula that took into account factors like advertisements in the trade journal *Show Business*, that between a hundred and fifty and two hundred are plying their trade in New York. Guskin is one of the supremos. He does not advertise. “For years, I was the best-kept secret in New York,” he says.

Guskin is a man of the theatre, and still works as a professional actor and director. His last acting job was in Woody Allen’s “Crimes and Misdemeanors” (his role ended up on the cutting-room floor); and his 1989 production of “Twelfth Night” for Joseph Papp’s Shakespeare in the Park (he directed a cast that included Michelle Pfeiffer, Gregory Hines, Jeff Goldblum, and Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio) pleased audiences, if not the local critics. “It was a wonderful production,” says the film director Sidney Lumet, who sent his daughter Jenny to Guskin before she made her acting début, in his police thriller “Q & A.” But Guskin’s greatest gift is for mediating between the text and the performer. He began teaching at Illinois Wesleyan in the early seventies; moved to the N.Y.U. School of the Arts; and in 1987, after a long stint of private coaching, arrived at the Public Theatre, where he held a Shakespeare workshop for several years. He now sees teaching as the most effective way for him to influence the art of theatre. “As good a director as I felt I was, and as good an actor as I felt I was, I felt it was more important that I teach and coach,” he says. “I felt I had more effect on the theatre and on acting in a general way than I ever had in my own acting and directing. I used to say in the old days that I wasn’t my own favorite actor. I was good. I was free. I was alive, but I loved other actors and what they came up with.”



Working with Guskin, Bridget Fonda says, is “like being in a psychoanalytic session for the character you’re playing.”

ROBERT RISKO

Kevin Kline claims credit for making Guskin an acting coach, back in 1968, when Kline, a lapsed classical pianist, was acting with the Vest Pocket Players, a coffeehouse troupe at Indiana University, and Guskin, a former classical trombonist, was part of the university’s professional repertory company. “We really needed a leader,” Kline says of the Vest Pocket Players. “And Harold emerged, within about an hour of being invited to join us, as the obvious leader. We would just do improvs, and during them I kept cracking up. Harold threw up his hands and said, ‘You know, we’ve got to have acting classes, because this is appalling. I’ve never seen such a lack of concentration.’ ” Kline was soon asking Guskin to coach him in Maxwell Anderson’s “Winged Victory.” “He did the most wonderful thing anyone could do for a young actor—he disabused me of the notion that acting was imitating what other actors do,” Kline says. “ ‘Who are *you* as a person?’ he asked. ‘How does the line resonate within *you* when you say it?’ I would have been nineteen or twenty. What does that line mean to *me*? It was like ‘Oh, wow!’ The whole sky just lifted up. I became alive as a performer. He empowered me to *trust myself*. It was a thrilling revelation.”

Guskin’s most distinguishing physical feature is his beard. His wife of twenty-six years, the playwright and screenwriter Sandra Jennings, claims never to have known him without one. In his younger days, when he was about forty pounds heavier, Guskin was often cast as a heavy, and took Edward G. Robinson as his model. Nowadays, there is a difference of opinion in the Guskin household about what quality his physiognomy projects. “I find him very sexy in the way that an Albert Finney is sexy,” Jennings says. “It’s a very distinctive, individual character look that is elfin and pixieish.” Guskin sees himself as a cuddly hybrid: part clown and part fanatic—a kind of hirsute Dustin Hoffman. “I’ve always seen myself as being a pain in the ass—kind of annoyed and bothered and taking things personally, although it’s not personal about the actor,” he says of his coach’s persona. Guskin has hurled a chair at Kevin Kline’s head; and once, in order to free up an earnest but hidebound actress, he ordered her to recite her lines with her head on the ground. “I won’t let them out of here until they’ve got it,” he says. “Sometimes it’s very harsh, because I say exactly what I see, and I can’t lie about it. I’ll say, ‘Don’t *dare* do that! Don’t do that! It’s horrible!’ At first, they look at me: ‘Is he really saying that?’ Of *course* I’m saying that. I want to get rid of it quickly.”

ALTHOUGH there is a crystal ball in the center of his mantelpiece, Guskin is not a swami or a guru or an ideologue. Recently, in Paul Rudnick’s Broadway comedy “I Hate Hamlet,” Guskin was parodied as Harold Gaffney, the acting coach of an aspiring classical actor, played by Evan Handler, who has studied with Guskin. As the part is written, Gaffney is an ersatz Lee Strasberg—a Method-acting imperialist, whose credo is "Act to Win." But Guskin, as Handler observed in rehearsals, is not a Method teacher. "I've actually researched all the various methods," Guskin says. "So I understood and took lots of exercises from these places, but I'm not committed to any of them. Therefore, I can just watch the actor. I've got nothing else in mind." Among the many theories Guskin has explored and absorbed are Konstantin Stanislavsky's breakdown of the text into "intentions"; Sanford Meisner's "repetition exercises," which are an attempt to make the actor listen better by forcing him to deal with another actor's previously spoken line before speaking his own; Robert Lewis's statue improvisation, where the actor is posed in a certain position and has to improvise his way from an external to an internal reality; Uta Hagen's intensive use of props to build the world of a character; Lee Strasberg's sense-memory exercises, which use the details of an actor's personal memory to flesh out the inner life of a character; and the avant-garde experiments in nonrealistic physical movement by Jerzy Grotowski and Peter Brook and Charles Marowitz. Guskin adapts exercises to the individual needs of his clients to elicit the kind of daring, irreverent, dangerous acting that he loves. Even to Guskin himself, there is an element of mystery about what he does. Actors come. They talk. They try things. Guskin is peddling not a system but a process. He believes that actors are athletes of the spirit, who have to be trained to show us those places in the heart where we (and they) hide feeling away. This is a courageous job and a hard one. It takes a certain kind of vigilance and tact to pry out the emotional stuff and shape it into character. "Harold's the acting doctor," Kline says. "He's a great diagnostician, and he's got a great bedside manner. He genuinely cares—or, at least, he gives the impression that he does. He really wants you to feel better, to do better, to help you solve the problem. That's why he would have made a great shrink."

Guskin has played a psychiatrist in a David Letterman sketch, and he majored in psychology and history at Rutgers before switching—after a four-year hiatus at the Manhattan School of Music—to drama in his last two years. He has two older brothers who hold doctorates in psychology. And although there is nothing remotely psychoanalytic about Guskin (other than the fee he charges for his services), you could be forgiven for seeing a kind of parody of the therapeutic process in the whole enterprise. The relationship between acting coach and actor has a particular emotional intensity—something that might almost pass as transference. "I don't know what I'd be doing if it weren't for Harold," Bridget Fonda says. "It's sort of like being in a psychoanalytic session for the character you're playing."

Guskin works mostly at home. Occasionally, like some psychotherapists, he will work over the phone: on one of my visits, Cicely Tyson had faxed him a scene from Los Angeles, and there was a message asking him to call her for some discussion within the hour. Sometimes, but only rarely, Guskin goes on location. He shuttled between Bridget Fonda and Jennifer Jason Leigh in Hollywood for "Single White Female," and travelled to England and Wales to coach Bob Dylan in "Hearts of Fire." ("I felt I was doing it for America," he says.) But the Guskin living room is his preferred arena. There is the de-rigueur box of Kleenex, but here it nestles between a chair and a Western saddle. The clock, which analysts discreetly keep out of their clients' sight, is hard to miss, because it is clunky and green and has a miniature train engine running around it; at the touch of a red button, it goes "wooh-wooh" and "chug-chug." Finally, there is Guskin's high-backed leather chair. Here, beside a large old wooden desk, which holds a rack of pipes, shelves of books, and snapshots of his family and his acting friends (the English comedians Lenny Henry and Dawn French, Kevin Kline and Phoebe Cates, the Frenchman Jean Reno), is where Guskin reads, listens, acts, and observes through gold-rimmed glasses. Except for a piano against one wall, everything in the room—a horseshoe of chairs, a sofa, a sprite on a serving dish on a side table—faces Guskin's chair. The chair's

"Mind paying this? I'm having a bad-money day."

most revealing feature is its mahogany armrests, whose dark varnish over the years of tough talking and tense listening has been worn away. Guskin has a different approach for each actor; and, likewise, each actor sits in a different relationship to him. Aidan Quinn likes the sofa, where he smokes if Jennings is not around. Kline takes off his shoes and sits on the floor, propped against the sofa. Bridget Fonda takes the easy chair and puts her feet up on its hassock. Paulina Porizkova starts at the chair closest to the threshold and gradually works her way around to the floor in front of Guskin's chair. Only Andie MacDowell has ever straddled the saddle.

ADAN BLACK, who is twenty-three and grew up in Madrid and has yet to appear on the professional stage, has the reckless heart of a matador and the drop-dead good looks of a tennis star, which is what he is, or was until three years ago. Between the ages of sixteen and nineteen, Black was enrolled at the Nick Bollettieri Tennis Academy, in Bradenton, Florida, and was a ranked professional. But after appearing as Scrooge at the University of Miami, where he was a student, he got interested in acting. At the time, he'd seen only one live performance. "With tennis, even though I was good, I never thought I was good enough," he says. "With this, I have no doubt." In 1992, he signed up for beginners' classes at the Stella Adler Conservatory, only to find on the day he arrived that they had been cancelled. He had no training, no knowledge of theatre, no credentials, no friends in New York, and no particular interest in being here. Although he'd never auditioned in his life, he decided to try for the only class available at the conservatory, Advanced Scene Study, which was taught by the actress Elaine Stritch (whom Black had never heard of). He got in. Black had also studied singing at Miami, and an adviser at Stella Adler sent him to Bernadette Peters' singing coach, Adrienne Angel. Angel, in turn, got Black to Guskin, and Guskin tried to persuade him to go back to college. The only audition piece that Black knew to perform for Guskin was one he'd written himself, about tennis. As soon as he began, Guskin cut him short. "Just talk," he said. But Guskin finally took Black on, because, he says, "I thought there was an unusual talent there." Now, two years and hundreds of coaching hours later, Adan Black—who has so far had only one scene, in "As the World Turns," but has nonetheless acquired an influential agent at the William Morris Agency and a personal manager—is sitting on Guskin's sofa, about to launch into one of Hamlet's soliloquies and to practice a Guskin maneuver called "taking it off the page."

"I use Shakespeare a lot," Guskin says. "Because the dialogue's so powerful, eventually it takes you to your real size and real dimension." For Guskin, Adan Black is a kind of work in progress, and these exercises are a way of revealing aspects of the actor to himself, so that he can learn to modulate them. "People have certain things that really fly out of them," he says. "Adan has great power, and that was hard enough to find, because for a long time it was held back." There is no holding back this time. Black takes a breath, tilts his compact body forward on the edge of the sofa, glances briefly at the lines, then throws himself into "O that this too too solid flesh would melt" with a fury that recalls John McEnroe upbraiding an umpire.

"Start again," Guskin says, reining Black in after "Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew!" "It's a hard speech. Everybody wants to get all that feeling pounding out right away. What's the first thought? What is the first image there?"

"That I wish my solid flesh was numb," Black says.

"Right. The first image isn't roaring. It's one of wanting to be air," Guskin says. "Just gone. Air. Nothing. So it's different, right? Take your time. Relax. See what happens."

Seeing what happens is one of the mainsprings of Guskin's approach. "You have to be available to both the cheapest and the deepest things that play on you," Guskin explains. "You can't censor anything. You give up your right to pick and choose your feelings once you start to act. Whatever the line provokes, that's what you do." In order to divest actors of preconceived notions and of self-consciousness, Guskin encourages them to grab their meaning off the page, without any previous preparation.

"You don't prepare anything. You just know who your character is basically," Phoebe Cates says. "You don't really know what she has to say. The experience of it is just throwing these lines at Harold and not knowing how they're going to come out. Harold teaches that it's fine not to know during the rehearsal period, even sometimes during performances. It happens so much in real life. I'm talking to you, and I don't know what I'm going to say next." The technique immediately puts the actor at the edge, forcing the imagination to make bold, instinctive choices. "The actors have nothing else to rely on but whatever is playing on them at the moment, which is raw instinct," Guskin says. "If you allow your mind to determine what you're going to do, your instinct runs for cover. Your mind makes safe choices. However, if you get the instinct out first, then your mind becomes really usable, because it saves you."

Black, in his second pass at the soliloquy, is experiencing something of the liberation in this seesaw between instinct and adjustment. This time, he leans back into the sofa, his arms extended over the top of it. "How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable / Seem to me all the uses of this world!" he says, in a near-whisper that continues to "Fie on't, ah fie!" Guskin stops him and starts picking the lines apart. "You see, on the one hand you say, 'Just let me vaporize, become air, anything.' But 'Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd / His canon 'gainst self-slaughter!' Well, that's different, isn't it? Two different things. You're afraid to go from one to the other; but that's what is there, so trust yourself. You ever wanted to just say, 'Forget it'? And then, the next moment, 'Fuck that' or maybe 'It's a scum of an earth'? Look at this world. It's all different. What you keep doing is you keep wanting to drag one into the other. What's the first thought?"

"O that this too too solid flesh . . ."

"Yeah, I noticed the 'this,' " Guskin says. "Each time, there's a pause between 'O' and 'this.' The beautiful-English approach, it's bullshit." Guskin repeats the line in bogus liquid British tones. "Think about what you're saying," he says. "*Nothing* else. Don't worry about how you're saying it. That should come out O.K." And in four subsequent tries it does. Instead of roaring, Black is reflective; instead of getting weepy—going for what Guskin calls the "sucker punch of the role"—he finds a zone of fierce vacillation. Guskin is pleased.

"He was gradually allowing the material to start to take him, rather than trying to take the material," Guskin says afterward. "You have to keep stretching him all the time away from where he expects to go. You just have to keep pushing him away until he starts to love surprising himself, wanting to find something new. It's not about having to do it right—'Let's be careful.' It's about taking material in, trusting yourself, teaching yourself how to do it."

Guskin's method requires patience and vigilance and a knowledge of the peculiar nature of an actor's emotional metabolism. "There's only one thing an actor can do," he says. "Whatever he's feeling, whatever he's thinking, whatever really matters to him at that moment. Whether right or wrong. Whether it's what the writer or director intended. Even if what's playing on him is 'I can't say it this way.' You *have* to say it that way, because it's the only thing playing on you. It's the best you've got at the moment. So if you get that out, what happens is, if it works it's liable to be amazing. If it doesn't work, it's really stupid and you can disregard it—not only disregard it, it actually goes away. When I was working on 'Hamlet' with Kevin Kline and some moronic choice would come out, he'd do it. The two of us would look at each other after this lunatic thing that didn't work had just come out, and Kevin would say, 'God, I'm glad I got rid of that here, so nobody else will see it.' "

In exploring the silly—even the stupid—impulses of his actors, Guskin also helps them to attack their fear. In acting, as in life, he believes, fear of humiliation is the enemy of inspiration. "It's death. It tightens you up. It puts you in a position where you're playing a protective role—reacting rather than acting. You have to feel what comes out. It has to have come out. So it's actually there, it's tangible. It's no longer a fear of yours. Otherwise it will stop you from feeling and responding. It'll stop the natural flow of creativity, because all of a sudden this thing is weighing on you. You haven't challenged yourself by getting it out. You haven't uncensored yourself."

The issue came up a few days later, when Guskin was working with Kate Skinner, an accomplished actress who he feels is about to break through. Skinner was going into rehearsal as Sonya in the Circle in the Square production of Chekhov's "Uncle Vanya," which was, coincidentally, her Broadway début. She had been talking through the character, and had said of Sonya, "She's like a loaf of bread. She's just so there. But she's also—She can be very strict. She's not a pushover. There's that sort of dialectic between her strength as a person—she's very basic—and her tremendous need for love from everybody because of her mother dying. Uncle Vanya is great, but he's this complicated, nuts kind of guy. She's had a lot of love withheld from her. So Astrov . . ."

"Well, is there anybody else for her?" Guskin asked.

"No. That's what I mean. This guy comes. Of course she's madly in love with him. Who wouldn't be?"

"He's Uncle Vanya's best friend."

"But she says that thing about six years: 'I loved him for six years.' "

"But why?"

"I think that's when she suddenly started—"

"What is six years ago?" Guskin asked. "How old is she six years ago?"

Skinner groans. "I haven't decided," she said.

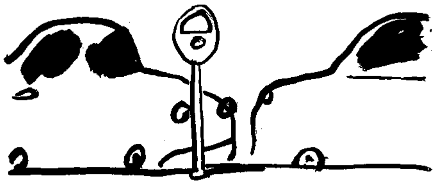
"So what do you mean by 'I've loved him for six years'? It's sexual?"

"Well, yeah."

"Now it's no longer a kid growing up, an older-brother kind of guy—someone who's great. You're in love with him, and everything. See, to me it's interesting. You said 'a loaf of bread.' This thing has risen."

"She's not poetic," Skinner said. "She's smart. But it's not, you know—"

"She doesn't have a real imagination about things, but she has deep feelings," Guskin cut in. "Because of that sexual thing, she's willing to make a fool of herself. It makes her very cruel. I think that's the sucker punch of the role. I think the cruelty is very important as a counterbalance to the sexuality."



Guskin took Skinner through the role until she got to the point where Sonya, alone with her thoughts after being with Astrov, ponders her plainness. Guskin suggested that Skinner cry.

"Don't make me do this, Harold," she said.

"Just be irrational, idiotic, moronic. Do it. *Do* it. Come on."

By the end, tears ran down Skinner's oval face as she said, in a beautifully textured reading, "How horrible to be ugly. Horrible. I'm not pretty. I know it. On Sunday after church, I heard a woman talking about me: 'She's so good and generous, too bad she's not pretty.' Not pretty."

"*That's* what you want to find," Guskin said, rocking forward in his leather chair. "How crazy is she? It just gets you in a place where you about have control over your rage." Later, though, after Skinner made a stab at the speech where Sonya probes Astrov's heart ("Tell me, Mikhail Lvovich, if I had a friend, or a younger sister, and you discovered that she—well, that she . . . she loved you. What would you do?"), Guskin stopped her. "You don't quite trust yourself enough here. Don't feel you have to get feeling into the line—it muddies it." And Guskin expanded on the pitfall of stuffing lines with too much emotion. "It's because of insecurity," he said. "You don't believe that your feelings will be seen or that the thought you had will be clear or meaningful enough. What you wind up doing is taking a true feeling or a true thought and pushing it. In pushing it, you make it fake."

GUSKIN'S probing, his goading, even his occasional hectoring, have one aim: "To free the actor to be available to the text, to be available to what the character brings up in him in the situation, to be available to the director as well. The actors are out there without me. They're on their own. That's their battle. It may not be a battle. It may be that the director says something, and they're so available that it strikes a chord and adds to the director's conception. The director has the conception. I have none. I'm not interested in the conception."

Guskin is, however, interested in his actors and in protecting their hard-won originality. In this context he preaches a gospel of professional ruthlessness that makes him sound like a kind of Savonarola. " 'The actor's got to be a pig.' That's what he said to me," Kevin Kline recalls. "A monster in the best sense—a *monstre du théâtre.*"

Guskin is unrepentant. "Reject justification," he tells his students. "It has to be, simply, 'I did it because I did it. I wanted to do it.' "

"He's a little subversive," says Bridget Fonda, who has learned through Guskin that the only power an actor has in the movies exists between the commands "Action" and "Cut." "Harold's the one who always reminds you 'Fuck 'em!' and 'Who cares!' and 'When the movie's over, you think they're gonna remember? If you do a good job, they're gonna love you.' He says to me a lot, 'Be ratty,' because I don't like to be." Guskin's tough talk emboldens his actors to face down the barrage of suggestions and compromises that inevitably chip away at a performance.

Although there are famous instances in which acting coaches and their stars (Paula Strasberg and Marilyn Monroe are the classic example) have undermined the authority of directors, Guskin is no such intrusive menace. "I don't go on the set unless the director invites me," he says. He broke the rule only once, to calm down the terrified impresario Bill Graham, who was cast as Lucky Luciano in Barry Levinson's "Bugsy." "I agreed to go on the set provided that Graham understood that I would not act as a coach," he explains. "I would watch, and he would introduce me as a friend. Never for a moment would I interfere. That'd be disgusting."

To Guskin, it's not the power of the coach but the artistry of the actor that matters. "You're no good in this job if you have ego involved in it," he says. "I'm saying to the actor, 'You're responsible for your work. You can't put it in the director's hands any more than you can put it in my hands.' " He continues, "I don't want the actors being bullied. I teach major actors and major acting. An actor takes on the mantle of power actor only by being unafraid to challenge everything around him. It's the stuff that giants are made of."

This rough-and-tough attitude also goes for auditions. "Harold will say, 'Look, you're at a great place here,' " Phoebe Cates says, about Guskin's audition technique. "He'll say, 'Don't go in and trash it all. Don't go in and give them what you think they want to see. The only value of this part to you is if you can play it this way. Do it the way you want. Otherwise it's not going to be anything new or challenging. It won't be a ride at all for you.' "

Kevin Kline remembers clowning around during a tech rehearsal for Sandra Jennings' "Beware the JubJub Bird," an Off Broadway play, directed by Guskin, in which Kline starred in 1976. "I just started being silly, which you can be with Harold, and after I'd spent about twenty minutes just clowning and making fun of the world, he said, 'If you would do that in a part—that thing you do. You must put that onstage, that's where you live as an actor.' Years later, I was doing a play and I just started to have fun, and it worked. Then it worked again, and again. That's what 'A Fish Called Wanda' was. A lot of the comic work I've done came from a sense of outrage that Harold always encouraged. 'Don't do it the right way. Go all the way with whatever crazy impulse you have.' "

Guskin acknowledges his own ability as a comic player. "A lot of people come to me because I'm funny," he says. "I can be funny opposite a very funny person." He remembers suggesting a comic angle to Kline for "The Pirates of Penzance": "What if this guy looks just like Errol Flynn—really looks like a great pirate—but the only thing is he's no good. Everything's just wrong. He takes out a sword and it looks great, but everybody hits the deck, because they know they're in trouble when you're around with the sword out." A few weeks later, Guskin went to Kline's house for a session—which he sometimes does for old friends. "I go over to his apartment," he recalls, "and I ring the bell. Down the stairs flies this character with a bandanna around his head. He's got two swords—two sticks—in his belt. He comes down, smashes into the door, opens the door, takes out a sword, says a few lines of dialogue, slams the sword into the floor to make a point, and it goes right into his foot. He spends the next couple of minutes trying to pull the thing out of his foot. I'm screaming. And Kevin stops, and goes 'Was that it?' " Guskin looked at Kline, who in that moment incarnated the bold explosiveness he'd been teaching for twenty-five years. "That's Heaven," he said. "Heaven." ♦

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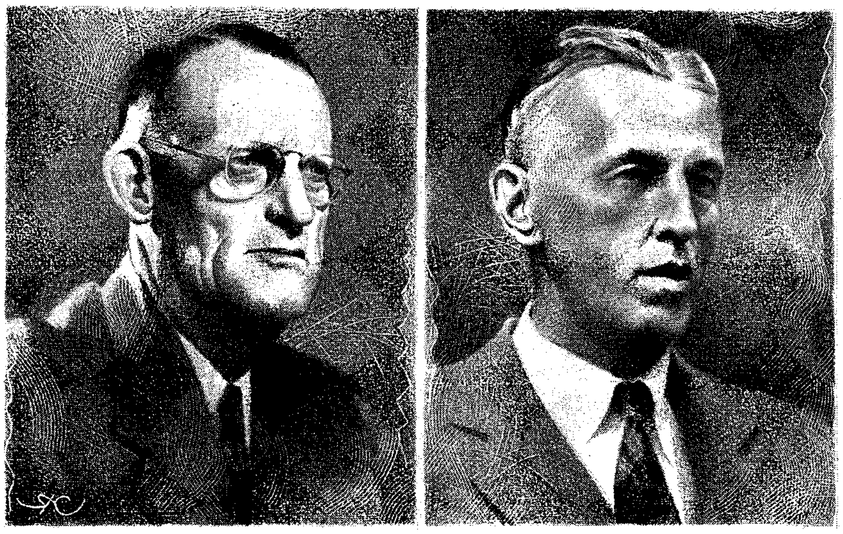
ANNALS OF ADDICTION

A.A. AT THE CROSSROADS

Now that America believes less in help-your-fellow than in blame-the-person-who-made-you-a-victim, can Alcoholics Anonymous still get its message across?

BY ANDREW DELBANCO AND THOMAS DELBANCO

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS turns sixty this year, and while its size and reach show no sign of waning (there are more than a million members in the United States and Canada, and eight hundred thousand more scattered through a hundred and forty other countries), there is a feeling among A.A. veterans that the fellowship is at a crossroads. At A.A.'s General Service Office, in the Interchurch Center in New York City, an austere office building at 120th Street and Riverside Drive that is known in the neighborhood as the God Box, one staff member reflected recently that the Age of the Founders was long gone—Bill Wilson, the New York stockbroker who led the movement for more than thirty years, died in 1971, and Bob Smith, the Ohio surgeon who founded it with him, had died twenty years earlier—and the Age of the Apostles was now ending. "There's practically no one alive today who was there when Bill and Bob met, or in that very first group," she said. "Pretty soon, there will be no early-timers at all."



In the thirties, Bob Smith and Bill Wilson's A.A. was the last stop before the abyss. At some meetings today, they "would be appalled."

RAUL COLON

Standing like a crewcut cadet among fops, the Interchurch Center is set between the ornate spire of Riverside Church, to the north, and a row of neo-baroque apartment houses, to the south. A reasonable facsimile of a midtown corporate fortress, it has revolving doors that spin you onto a mopped marble floor, and a badged guard who eyes you from behind a security counter. In A.A.'s eleventh-floor office—described by one staff member as "the visible clearing house of an invisible organization"—close to a hundred people are at work, filling orders for A.A.'s publications, referring callers to local groups, disseminating information to the public and to the medical and counselling professions. "We are a repository of group experience," he said. "People write us about a problem they're having in their group—an unruly member, a question about confidentiality. We share experience by telling them what's been done in similar situations in the past. We don't issue directives. We don't hand down rules."

Besides being the nerve center for the more than fifty thousand registered A.A.

groups in the United States, the General Service Office is a shrine. Its corridors are hung with poster-size photographs of the founders, and placards bearing their sayings; along one long wall of an anteroom that leads into the organization's archive is a locked glass case containing various editions of the Big Book—the basic A.A. text, which has sold thirteen million copies since it was first published, in 1939. "I consider the Big Book an inspired text, written by Bill under the guidance of the spirit," another staff member said. "And I worry that I see a shrinking in the reading and studying of the Big Book. People paraphrase it incorrectly. Some do spot reading, or they don't read it at all."

Some members say that if the Big Book is losing its hold on new members, it may be because its image of the alcoholic is hopelessly cornball and exclusively male: he is a travelling salesman tempted by the hotel bar; he is compared in his desperation to a "gaunt prospector, belt drawn in over the last ounce of food"; or, in his drunken oblivion, to "the farmer who [comes] up out of his cyclone cellar to find his home ruined," looks around, and remarks to his wife, "Don't see anything the matter here, Ma. Ain't it grand the wind stopped blowin'?" There is even a condescending chapter addressed "To Wives." Today, A.A. is more than a third women, and twenty per cent of the membership is under thirty—people for whom prospectors and storm shelters are defunct metaphors.

Others think the integrity of the fellowship is being threatened by "people who come in because the courts or rehab centers send them," in the words of Dr. Marc Galanter, a New York psychiatrist who has written extensively about A.A. "Many of these people have to get a meeting card checked off to show that they're fulfilling the obligations of, say, their suspended sentence—and though A.A. welcomes them, this is something that's basically against what makes the fellowship work. Coming in is supposed to be voluntary—an act of spiritual surrender, not acquiescence to some legal requirement."

And others think that A.A. is becoming a social club where people of leisure show up casually, in order to make deals or dates. "It used to be that when someone talked about suffering, you could hear a pin drop," a retired advertising writer who has been in A.A. for sixteen years said. "But now people come to the meetings with a bottle of designer water in hand, and there's more and more talk about success. It kills the meeting. People get up to pee, or to look for an ashtray." One member, a carpenter of about forty who lives near a posh New York suburb, put it this way: "We have actually become afraid of the still suffering alcoholic. If a drunk walked into a meeting in my town, people would be aghast. We've become *too nice* for that." He still attends his home meeting, he said, but he goes once a month to a meeting in a men's shelter in a neighboring town, to get "the real thing."

It is not only this squeamishness before the hard-core alcoholic that bothers A.A. veterans, but what they see as a growing expectation among some members that meetings will amount to a form of public coddling. Sometimes this expectation is met ("unconditional love" is how one member described what she encountered at her first meeting); but sometimes it is disappointed. When a young woman at a meeting we attended said in a private-schoolish whine that she, as a recovering alcoholic, deserved "more space" than she was getting from her non-drinking friends, a young man in dreadlocks looked at her with a mischievous grin and said, "When I was drinking, I had the same problem you have now. I had not yet achieved low self-esteem."

The rebuke was a pure expression of "the real thing"—of the Big Book's principle that "self-delusion, self-seeking, and self-pity" are "the root of our troubles," that we "must be rid of this selfishness. We must, or it kills us!" But some veterans are troubled that this basic A.A. insight is invoked less often than it used to be. They worry that alcoholism, which was once a source of convicting shame in America, is being turned into an alibi. They mention the recent case of a Westchester man who confessed at an A.A. meeting to a murder committed while he was on a binge, and then mounted a legal defense based on the claim that alcohol had led him to confuse his victims with the parents who had emotionally abused him as a child. And they laugh—though not with real amusement—about the case of Leonard Tose, the former owner of the Philadelphia Eagles, who responded to a suit to collect gambling debts brought by an Atlantic City casino a few years ago by countersuing and claiming that the casino had allowed him to gamble away his fortune while he was manifestly drunk. "A.A. is not about excuses," one longtime member said. "It's about obligations. Bill and Bob would be appalled."

A.A. came into existence at a time when Americans were introduced to fear and futility on a scale that had not been previously imagined and has not been matched since—a time when it was a common experience for a man to feel prosperous one day and to be reduced to nothing the next. When A.A. first took form, in the nineteen-thirties, it was not a place where one came to ventilate anxiety about the enervation of a stressful life. It was the last stop before the abyss.

For many drinking Americans, Prohibition had been less an obstacle than a nuisance. (H. L. Mencken reported that he failed only twice during Prohibition to find a drink—once when he was travelling in Pennsylvania and did not realize that "seafood" was the local euphemism for beer.) During "the dry years," Bill Wilson had made his living as a kind of mobile industrial-espionage agent, scouting out companies for his brokerage house by befriending research-and-development men in their local watering holes, and then stiffening his will with another drink before attempting to persuade investors of the truth of tips he only half believed himself. By the time of Repeal, in 1933, he had drunk himself out of his job.

He and his wife, Lois, who at that time worked as a salesclerk in Macy's, joined the ranks of Depression vagabonds, living with her parents, with friends, or on their own in shabby apartments. Paul Lang, the archivist in charge of the Wilson family papers at Stepping Stones, their eventual permanent home, in northern Westchester County (it is now a historic site, maintained by a foundation established upon Lois's death), counts fifty-four different addresses for the couple in the early nineteen-thirties. These were hellish years, during which three ectopic pregnancies ended Lois's hope of bearing children and the pace of Bill's drinking grew in proportion to his shame. Bill would dry out periodically in a clinic on Central Park West called the Towns Hospital, then try to stay sober until the "small, cold ball of fear . . . in his stomach would surge up," and only a drink could mitigate his terror of its return. He promised abstinence and was meanwhile hiding his liquor from his wife "as a squirrel would cherish nuts . . . in the attic, on beams, underneath the flooring . . . in the flush box of toilets." The archive at Stepping Stones contains Lois's personal Bible, in which Bill wrote periodic pledges to stay sober—promises whose ingenuousness is matched by a fear legible in the handwriting itself, which becomes increasingly spidery as it moves down the page:

> To my beloved wife that has endured so much let this stand as evidence of my pledge to you that I have finished with drink forever.
> Bill
> Oct. 20, 1928.
>
> Thanksgiving Day 1928. My strength is renewed a thousandfold in my love for you.
>
> To tell you once more that I am finished with it. I love you. Jan. 12, 1929.
>
> Finally and for a lifetime. Thank you for your love. Sept. 3, 1930.

As Bill later wrote in the Big Book, he was locked in this cycle of resolution and relapse by his inveterate tendency to compensate for pain by finding someone or something to blame:

> With the alcoholic . . . this business of resentment is infinitely grave. We found that it is fatal. For when harboring such feelings we shut *ourselves off from the sunlight of the Spirit.* The insanity of alcohol returns and we drink again. And with us, to drink is to die.

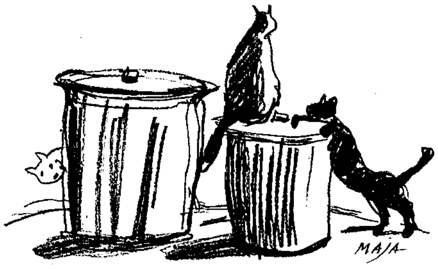
It was in the detox hospital in 1934 that Bill first arrived at this difficult knowledge. The epiphany came as his doctors were putting him through the usual regimen: sedating him with belladonna and purging him with castor oil. (Medicine had—and has—made little progress in treating alcoholism since the eighteenth century, when the pioneer physician Benjamin Rush treated a man "habitually fond of ardent spirits" by mixing tartar emetic with his rum.) Left to endure the craving and the cramps in a room that had been cleared of potential suicide instruments, Bill had the experience that broke the cycle:

> My depression deepened unbearably and finally it seemed to me as though I were at the bottom of the pit. I still gagged badly on the notion of a Power greater than myself, but finally, just for the moment, the last vestige of my proud obstinacy was crushed. All at once I found myself crying out, "If there is a God, let Him show Himself! I am ready to do anything, anything!"
>
> Suddenly the room lit up with a great white light. I was caught up into an ecstasy which there are no words to describe. It seemed to me, in the mind's eye, that I was on a mountain and that a wind not of air but of spirit was blowing. And then it burst upon me that I was a free man. Slowly the ecstasy subsided. I lay on the bed, but now for a time I was in another world, a new world of consciousness. All about me and through me there was a wonderful feeling of Presence, and I thought to myself, "So this is the God of the preachers!"

Bill left the hospital as a man possessed, roaming New York, in the words of his biographer, Robert Thomsen, "at all hours, indefatigable and incorrigible, totally convinced that if *he* could do it, could find a way out, [anyone] could do it." He literally dragged drunks home from the gutter, inflicting them on his wife, who fed and bunked them in their Brooklyn home while he pleaded that they consign themselves to "the Presence." Mostly, what the Wilsons got in return was petty thievery and, sometimes, vomit on the floor.

In the grip of his new obsession, Bill found himself ridiculed not as a drunk but as a fit successor to temperance fanatics like Carry Nation. In the first decade of this century, Carry Nation had toured the country from saloon to saloon, smashing—as her biographer Robert Lewis Taylor puts it—"Venetian mirror[s] with brickbats," ripping "candid and stimulating prints from the walls," and, on one notorious occasion, throwing "a billiard ball at what she mistakenly took to be Satan lounging behind the bar." She ended her life, in the words of the historian Norman Clark, as "a carnival freak . . . a sideshow for a series of county fairs, armed with hatchets and her Bible"—and to many who watched Bill on the prowl he seemed headed for the same oblivion. Yet however unavailing these efforts were for his "patients," they had the strange effect of somehow keeping him sober himself.

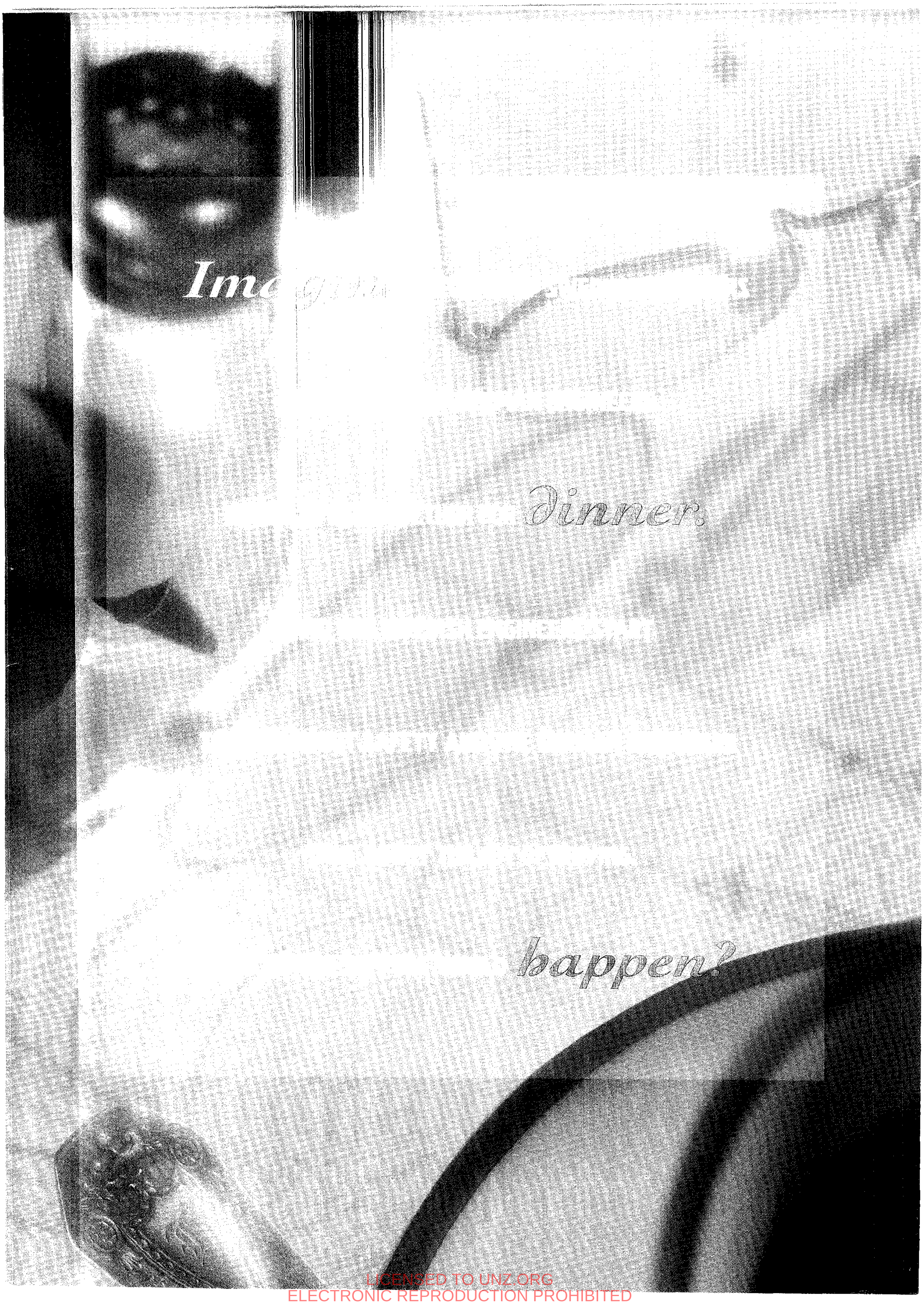
Bill did not come close to a "slip" until the spring of 1935, when he found himself in an Akron hotel lobby with nothing to do on a weekend afternoon. A business deal that had brought him to town had fallen through, and he was drawn by the sociable sounds of the bar. Retreating to a phone booth as if to a pocket of air in a room fast filling with smoke, he dialled all the church numbers he could find in the local directory, and when a clergyman answered he said—not knowing quite why—that he was a "rumhound from New York" who needed "to speak *now*" with another alcoholic.



He ended up visiting a local surgeon named Bob Smith, who was known around town as a hopeless boozer; and their encounter was, in effect, the first A.A. meeting. Dr. Bob never touched another drop for the remaining fifteen years of his life, going "dry into his casket," as the poet John Berryman wrote in his novel "Recovery," which is about his own A.A. experience. "Look up his life sometime, there must be stuff."

It took a while for the two men to identify the "stuff" that had saved them: the therapeutic value for oneself of helping another person stay sober. "Our talk was a completely *mutual* thing," Bill recalled. "I had quit preaching. I knew that I needed this alcoholic as much as he needed me. *This was it.*" Together, they began to visit patients in detox, telling their story, and inviting them to give the new talking therapy a try. Let us talk to you, for our own sakes, they said, in effect, and then talk to us and we'll listen. Sometimes they were shooed away like pestering salesmen. But soon they had a success—with a businessman who was going through his eighth detoxification in six months, the previous one having begun with his punching two nurses in the eye. At first, he resisted, and railed at his wife for revealing his drinking to strangers. When she coaxed him into seeing them, he braced himself for another sales pitch. But he relented when he realized that "all the other people that had talked to me wanted to help *me*, and my pride prevented me from listening to them . . . but I felt as if I would be a real stinker if I did not listen to a couple of fellows for a short time, if that would cure *them*"—and he became the third member of the new fellowship that called itself a "bunch of nameless alcoholics."

The principle on which the new group was based was that no one is responsible for the wreckage of the alcoholic's life except the alcoholic himself. No matter what has been done *to* you, members would be told, you are responsible for what is done *by* you. They would refuse to project evil onto some blamable cause,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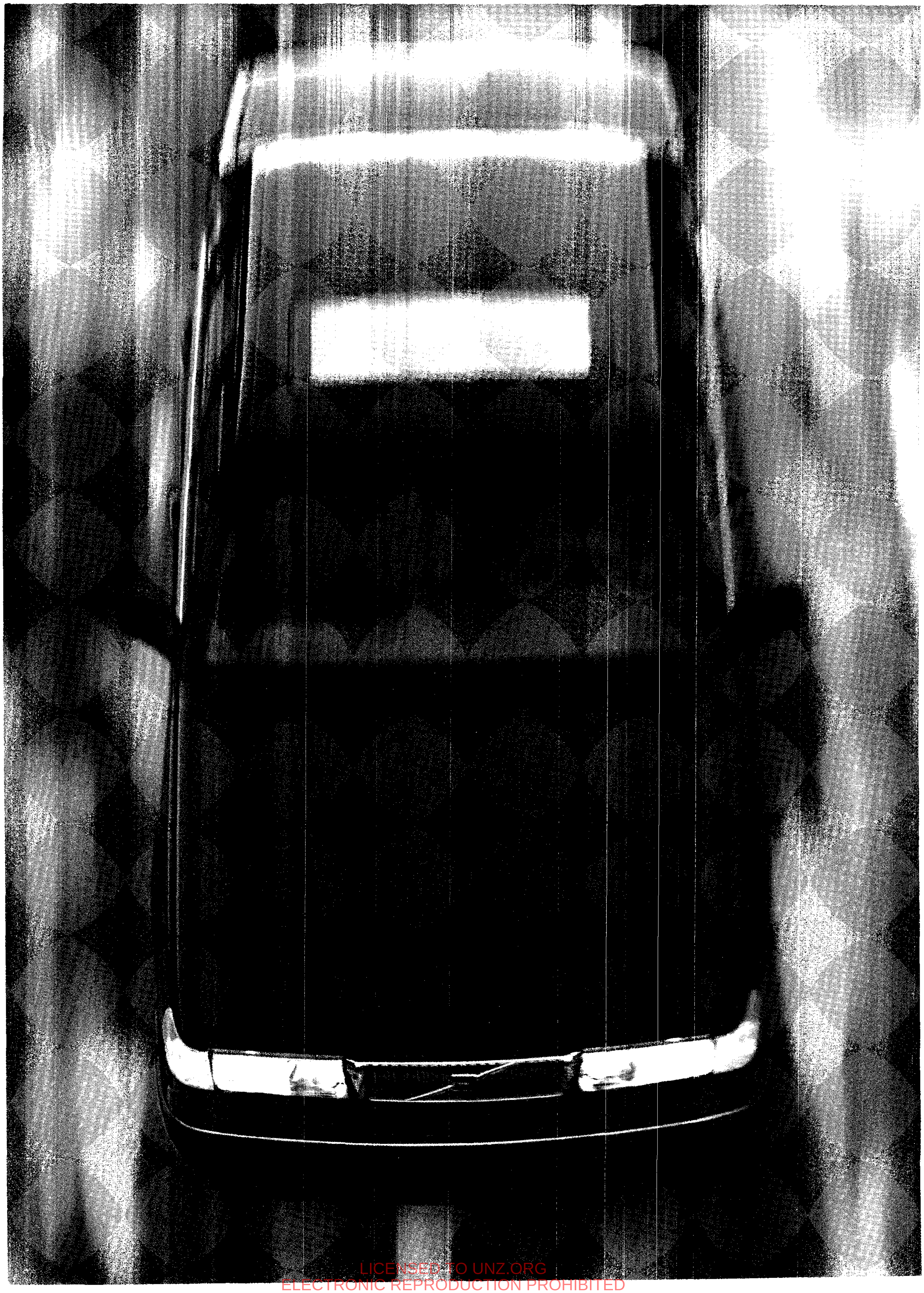

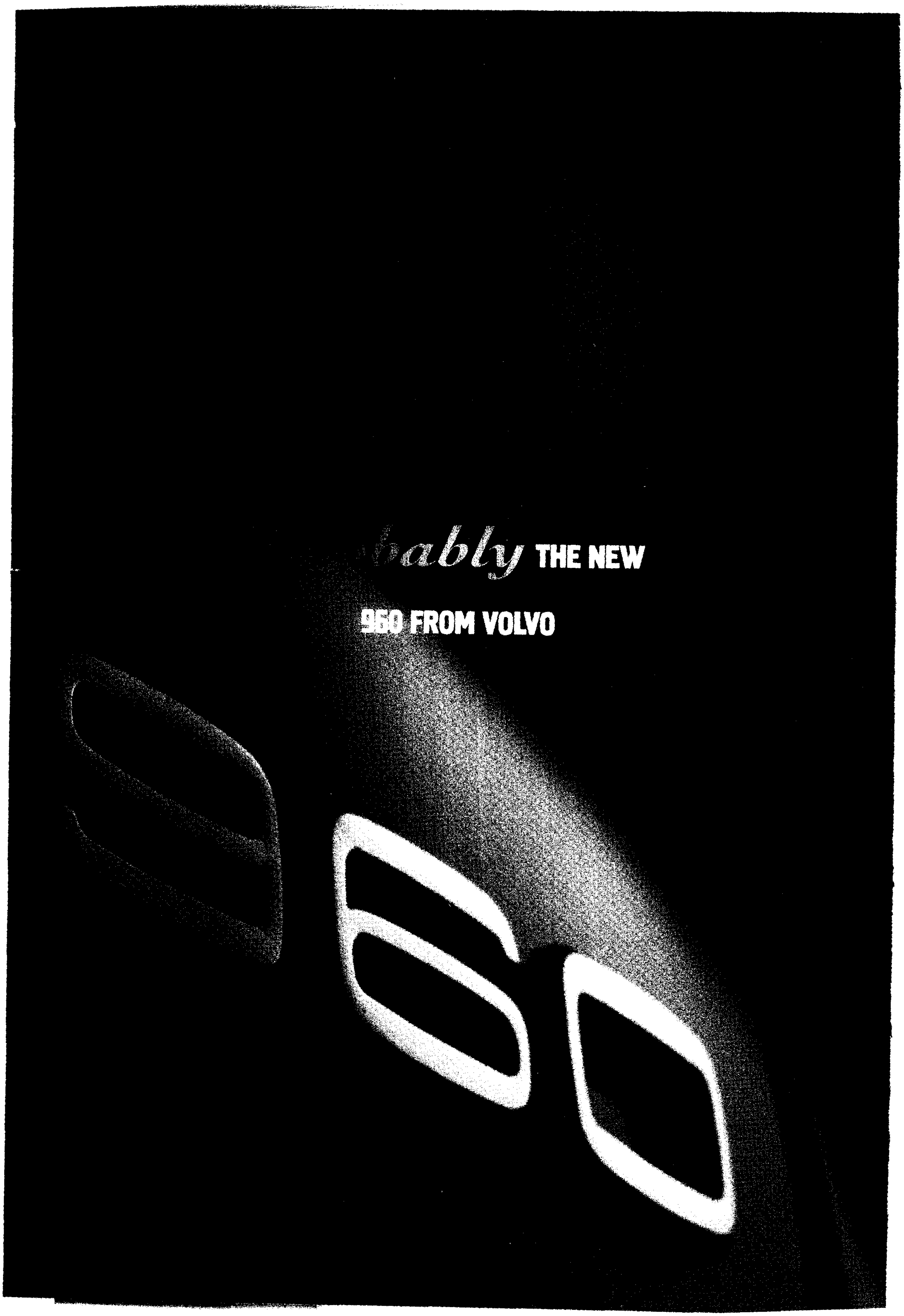
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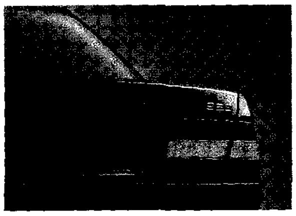

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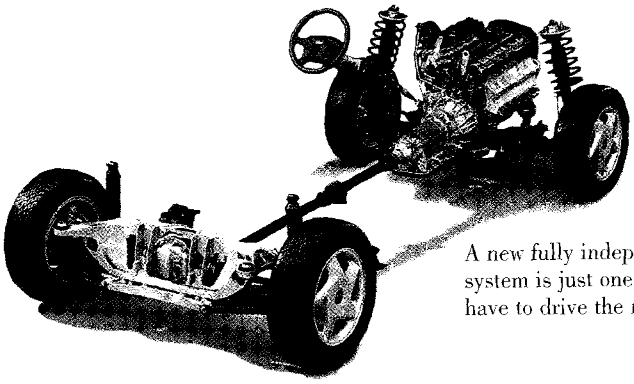

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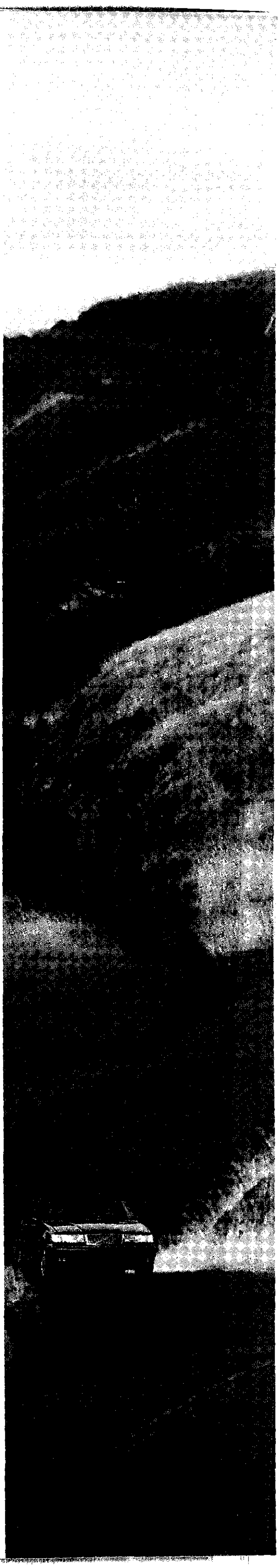

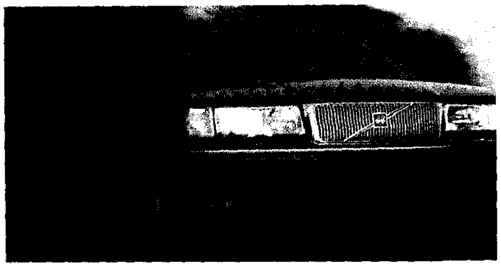

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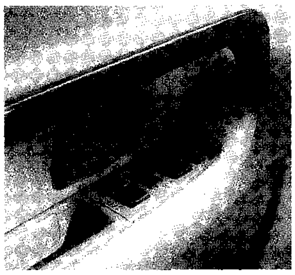

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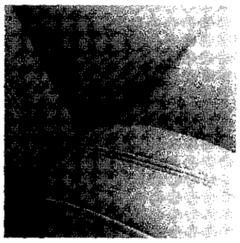

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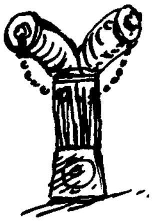
even though they might speak of alcoholism as (in the Big Book's words) an "illness" or "allergy," and of some people as alcoholic before they ever touched a drop, as if they were born tinctured by a poison activated by the first drink.

Within Alcoholics Anonymous (the name was adopted in 1939), some people speak of its astonishing growth after the Akron meeting as the expansion of God's dominion. But there has always been a palpable tension between what might be called the pietist and the rationalist wings of the movement; and traces of this division remain in the Twelve Steps, the list of principles that Bill Wilson drew up as he wrote the Big Book:

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him.*
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, *as we understood Him,* praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

Although some members still speak of these steps as if they were brought down from Sinai or were revealed, like the Book of Mormon, by a messenger angel, they are in fact products of contention that is still discernible in them. Their wording was under debate until just before release of the Big Book, when the phrase "on our knees" was deleted from Step 7 and "as we understood Him" was inserted in Steps 3 and 11. Some regard such concessions as proof of the democratic genius of the fellowship—of its ability to modulate the idea of a personal deity into an abstraction that can accommodate all members, including non-Christians and agnostics. Others worry that God has become so vague a conception that he has disappeared. Evidently wearied by the prevalence of the term "self-help," one member complains, "We're not a *self*-help program. If we were helping ourselves, we'd be in trouble. We are a spirit-help program, a God-help program."

God has always been A.A.'s raw nerve. Bill confided in only a few friends about how "the Presence" had manifested itself to him, lest A.A. become linked in the public mind with crackpots and ranters. But shortly after that hospital experience a friend recommended to him William James's "The Varieties of Religious Experience." Bill read the book with the gratitude one feels toward a respectable witness who confirms that he, too, has heard the disembodied voice or seen the ghost that has brought one under suspicion of madness. James (whom Bill came to refer to as "one of the founders") seemed to know at first hand the power of alcohol to make one feel uncontested at the center of the universe—to turn any party into *your* fête, any music into *your* serenade:



> Sobriety diminishes, discriminates, and says no; drunkenness expands, unites, and says yes. It is in fact the great exciter of the *Yes* function in man. It brings its votary from the chill periphery of things to the radiant core.

And when James wrote about the futility of mental effort he seemed to grasp exactly what Bill had undergone in Towns Hospital:

> You know how it is when you try to recollect a forgotten name. Usually you help the recall by working for it, by mentally running over the places, persons, and things with which the word was connected. But sometimes this effort fails: you feel then as if the harder you tried the less hope there would be, as though the name were *jammed,* and pressure in its direction only kept it all the more from rising. And then the opposite expedient often succeeds. Give up the effort entirely; think of something altogether different, and in half an hour the lost name comes sauntering into your mind, as Emerson says, as carelessly as if it had never been invited. Some hidden process was started in you by the effort, which went on after the effort ceased, and made the result come as if it came spontaneously.

James ratified the value of giving oneself up rather than "pulling oneself together"—an ineffably strange reversal for a man like Bill, whose life had once been all about seizing opportunities, looking for the main chance, training, disciplining, driving himself. When Bill read that "something must give way, a native hardness must break down and liquify," he recognized an account of what had happened to him.

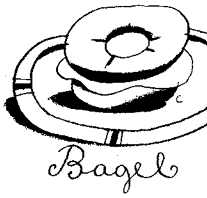
This experience of giving way and breaking down remains the key to every A.A. meeting, as it was at one we attended on a rainy Saturday morning in a Boston mental-health center—one of those nineteen-sixties scored-concrete buildings with all the charm of a highway trestle. On the steps outside, men slept curled in the rain. Inside, the atmosphere was festive. A tidy-looking young man (polo shirt, pressed khakis) was telling a group of about forty men and women how he had stepped, for no apparent reason, in front of a mirrored column in a subway station. Walking around it, as if he had been suddenly vouchsafed the ability to see himself from without, he stared at his own face, yellow and jowly, really seeing it for the first time. For months, he said, he had been drinking two bottles of wine every night in between apéritifs and chasers. In that instant, he knew he would never drink again. But he had no idea why.

One hears as many metaphors for such an experience as there are members who speak. One member at the Boston meeting likened it to the feeling of a runner who gets a second wind—that eerie sensation when exertion suddenly subsides into limpid ease. Another compared it to what happens when you learn to ride a bicycle—to that moment when you stop straining to find your balance and suddenly it's there. One young man at a New York meeting described the splitting away of his old self as if he had been a plank with a fault line running through it until a pressure came that made the board break.

The later editions of the Big Book play down this expectation of "sudden and spectacular upheaval," and report instead that "most of our experiences are what the psychologist William James calls the 'educational variety' because they develop slowly over a period of time." But, whether the release is sudden or slow, public testimony about the hell in which one lived before deliverance is indispensable for both speakers and listeners; and the talking therapy has no designated end.

Like cancer patients in remission, A.A. members think of themselves as "arrested," not "cured." With the possibility of backsliding never far out of mind, they regard each day of sobriety as an unmerited gift, and each A.A. meeting as a holding action—because "each lapse," as James wrote, "is like the letting fall of a ball of string which one is carefully winding up; a single slip undoes more than a great many turns will wind again."

As A.A. took form, Bill and Bob had no particular historical model in mind. They were not bookish men. But it is uncanny how closely their new fellowship resembled the first American churches that had been "gathered" three centuries before. The founders of those churches, named Puritans because of their implacable objections to the rituals of England's state church, had instituted in America a practice of public confession, in which each member of the congregation spoke of his or her enslavement to sin and of how the bondage had been broken. The Puritans had called these testimonies "conversion relations" or "professions of faith." A.A. called them "drunkalogues."



In the A.A. view, just as in that of the Puritans, salvation is not something one can possess by means of a penitential act now and then. Rather, it is a state of endless striving. The work of salvation, as the Puritan theologian Jonathan Edwards wrote in the seventeen-forties, must be, for each person, "not only . . . the business of Sabbath days, or certain extraordinary times, or the business of a month, or a year, or of seven years . . . but the business of his life . . . which he perseveres in through all changes, and under all trials, as long as he lives." The convert's obligation to his fellows is not satisfied by a coin in the Sunday collection basket. "Faith has to work twenty-four hours a day in and through us," as the Big Book puts it, "or we perish." There is no evidence that Bill himself ever followed James back to Edwards (in whose writings James found an "admirably rich and delicate description" of conversion), but if he had he would have found more than a congenial spirit. He would have experienced a shock of recognition when he came upon Edwards's list of signs by which the anxious seeker tests the validity of his or her spiritual experience. Did it come from God, or was it hallucinatory? Edwards enumerated twelve signs by which one could tell. They do not match A.A.'s Twelve Steps with the exactness of a stencil, but they come close. Here is the twelfth sign, which he called the "sign of signs" and "evidence of evidences" (the Big Book calls the Twelfth Step "the capstone" and "foundation stone" of all the rest):

> Whatever pretenses persons may make to great discoveries, great love and joys, they are no further to be regarded, than they have influence on their practice.

Substantially the same as A.A.'s Twelfth Step, this statement contains what James called the whole of Edwards's work. It is "an elaborate working out of [the] thesis [that] the *roots* of a man's virtue are inaccessible to us," James wrote. "No appearances whatever are infallible proofs of grace. Our *practice* is the only sure evidence, even to ourselves, that we are genuinely Christians." If, in other words, two people claim they are saved, and one sees Jesus' blood running down the bedroom wall, while the other sees only the swirls and cracks in the plaster, this difference between them has not the slightest significance. The only evidence that one's inner spiritual condition has changed is visible evidence of a new responsibility toward others in one's outward practice.

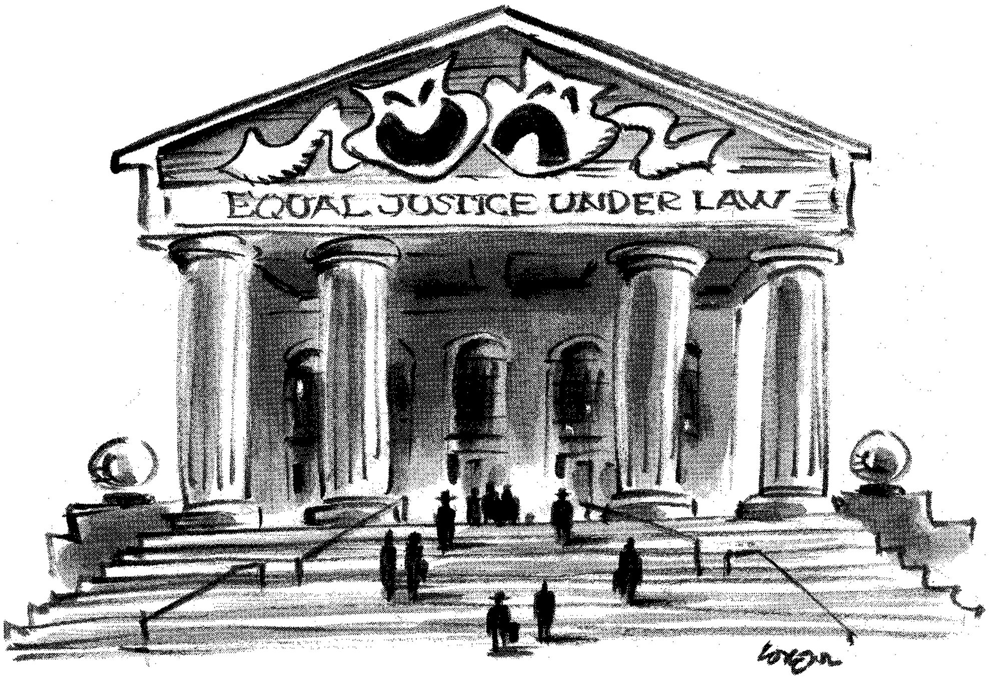
James repeated this point again and again, as if to rebuke his Harvard colleagues, who thought he had gone soft on God. The question of whether someone's conversion had a supernatural cause or could be explained in purely psychological terms held no interest for James. (Freud, working with a dualistic model of the mind, later described such events as an internal rupture in the psyche through which the unconscious pours into consciousness.) Like Edwards, James was not interested in causes—only in results. It matters not a whit if the convert is transformed by God or by the smile of a child. The only thing that matters is the result of the experience. "If the *fruits for life* of the state of conversion are good," James wrote, "we ought to idealize and venerate it . . . if not, we ought to make short work with it. . . ."

When it comes to applying this standard of results to A.A., not much is known about its aggregate impact on American alcoholics. Most experts estimate the number of alcoholics in the United States at ten to fifteen million, and some believe that nearly one in ten adults has attended an A.A. meeting at some time in his life. In 1968, recognizing that "our communications to the professional community had very little credibility because of a lack of objective data," A.A. began to conduct periodic surveys of its members in order to assess its own efficacy. In a 1989 survey of almost ten thousand members chosen at random, thirty-five per cent of the respondents reported less than a year of sobriety, thirty-six per cent between one and five years, and twenty-nine per cent more than five years.

But what such numbers mean is far from clear. For example, the survey also revealed that about half of newcomers leave A.A. after less than three months, and that "after the first year . . . attrition continues, but at a much slower rate." If you try to adjust the numbers to reflect these facts, it is still difficult to come up with a true sobriety (or "salvation") rate. The best the editors of an exhaustive recent monograph on research on A.A. can do is conclude that "long-term sobriety occurs within a select minority of those who initially attend A.A." For certain cancers, this would represent a good outcome. For most bacterial diseases, it would not. To the theological father of Puritanism, John Calvin, who wrote in 1536 that if "the same sermon is addressed to a hundred persons, twenty receive it with the obedience of faith; the others despise, or ridicule, or reject, or condemn it," a "select minority" would seem about right.

It was the test of results that clarified for Bill what had happened to him in Towns Hospital. It gave him a way to answer those who said he had simply substituted a new addiction—A.A.—for his old one. When he had been drinking, he had been "at the gates of insanity," he wrote, and other people were obliterated by the intensity of his narcissism. But when, first in Brooklyn and then in Akron, and then through A.A., his mind had been directed outward, he was restored to the world of persons. Edwards called this new engagement with other people "consent to being." A.A. calls it "Twelve-Stepping."

Twelve-Stepping is based on the insight that altruism has *selfish* value, in that charity gives hope to the giver: "When the phone rings at two in the morning," one member told us, "and it's a member in my group who needs help, I get up and go. Anything else in my life I will negotiate. But in A.A. I just do it. It doesn't make any sense to get up at two on a snowy night. But you do it all the same."



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In light of the fact that the religious dimension of A.A. has made many prospective joiners uneasy (newcomers sometimes have the self-conscious look of stragglers in the pews when everyone else is taking communion), it is striking how respectfully A.A. is regarded by even the most secular-minded experts in the field of addiction. We spoke with one such authority, Dr. Steven Hyman, who is the director of the Mind, Brain, Behavior Initiative, at Harvard University, in a squat brick building at the old Charlestown Navy Yard which used to be a storehouse for torpedoes but is now a research facility of the Massachusetts General Hospital, complete with atrium and café. Dr. Hyman, who looks like Pavarotti in fighting trim, does not initially impress one as likely to have much tolerance for a movement that began when a patient was seized in his hospital bed by "the Presence." In this respect, he surprised us.

"The great A.A. insight was not just that alcoholism is a disease but that having this disease is not an excuse for anything—not for missing work, messing up your family, killing people in automobiles," he began. "In terms of cause, alcoholism does have genetic causes, cultural causes, circumstantial causes. But there's nothing deterministic about its *consequences*. That's the strange paradox A.A. understood, and it seems to be more and more difficult for people to accept."

Dr. Hyman added, "I have no problem with the A.A. method," and launched into an explanation of how a spiritual therapy could relieve a physiological affliction. Rummaging through the papers on his desk, he came up with an M.R.I. film of a rat's brain after the animal had been injected with cocaine. It showed a splatter of bright streaks on a dark background, like fireworks against the night sky. This picture, he said, revealed a neurological system that was more complexly developed in human beings but served basically the same function in people as in rats. He described an experiment done in Canada in the nineteen-fifties, in which electrodes were affixed to a succession of sectors of a rat's brain. A lever was placed within reach of the animal so that it could send current into itself by depressing the switch. "In some places, the effect was highly aversive," Dr. Hyman said. "You can imagine the experience of feeling electrical sensations in your paws. But when the electrodes were attached to certain other locations, the rat would press the lever thousands of times to get more of it—until exhaustion supervened.

"Now, why do we have such a system—a brain that will light up when you charge it with electricity or drugs? Because some things are too important to leave to cognition. If you left them up to people to calculate, they'd get messed up. Nature's experience with sexual reproduction would have been a big failure unless sex were profoundly rewarding. So we have a neurological system that says, 'That was good, let's do it again.' A few natural substances, including alcohol, tap into this system in the brain that says, 'That was good, let's do it again, and let's remember exactly how we did it.' And, since you're bombarded every day by millions of sensations, the brain is organized in such a way that certain indispensable experiences, like sex, have the greatest affective valence, and become objects of desire."

Dr. Hyman's name for the process by which this system is captured by drugs is "adaptation," which is "a way of making long-term changes in the way the brain works, so that you can remember experience." This kind of "learning" uses many of the same biological processes in the brain as in other parts of the body. "Let's say you wanted to look like Schwarzenegger, and you went to the gym and started pumping iron," he said. "Your arms would really hurt. But eventually you would have an adaptive response. The genes in the nuclei in your muscle cells would start making more messenger RNA and then more protein to build up those muscles, and pretty soon—especially if you also took anabolic steroids—you would look like Schwarzenegger. These adaptive responses are universal. Some are helpful, like bulking up, which is essentially a response to injury. Others are a problem—as when people develop a tolerance for their asthma medicine. In fact, they not only need stronger doses but become dependent. If they don't get their asthma medicine, they have worse asthma attacks.

"Addiction, in other words, is a form of adaptation. Our best current understanding of alcoholic addiction is that, in response to bombardment by the chemical ethanol, chronic adaptations occur in the brain's reward circuitry. There are individual genetic and developmental and environmental factors that help determine who will get addicted to alcohol or how soon—matters we know very little about. But, in the context of individual vulnerability, adaptations will occur in the circuitry in response to the drug. Once this happens, the user becomes dependent on it for his world to be O.K. The brain says, 'That was good, I feel O.K.' If you're an alcoholic, you simply can't imagine a day without drinking. *You need that hit.* Your brain demands it." With almost reverent intensity, Hyman said, "If you understand addiction, you understand something very profound about the human brain—how it hijacks the cortex in the service of the primordial lizard brain."

Hyman went on, "Now, to help people with these molecular changes in their brain, we have to come up with things that will deliver compensatory pleasure—a requirement that it's tough to get the medical and scientific professions to accept. A.A. understood this. In fact, they're still ahead of us. Most pharmacological research is still focussed on the development of drugs that block pleasure. An example is naltrexone, a long-acting blocker of opiate receptors. If you take it every morning, and shoot up heroin later in the day, you will not get high. It looked terrific in the lab. The trouble is that, once it was approved for heroin users, the compliance rates were about fifteen per cent, because the addicts said it made them feel lousy. Naltrexone has just been approved as a drug for decreasing craving in alcoholism. My prediction is that it won't work, because it doesn't give something back."

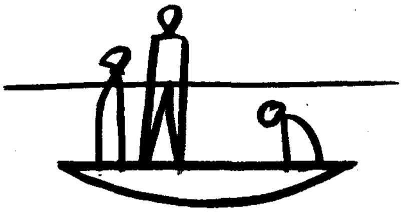
Hyman's account of addiction is an impeccably accurate rendition of the doctrine of original sin as Jonathan Edwards expounded it. What Hyman calls "the reward-circuitry of the brain" Edwards called the "faculty by which the soul . . . is inclined to . . . or disinclined from . . . sensible objects." Both regard it as inborn, and yet both insist that people are fully responsible for how they act on its inclinations. Edwards thought of this paradox as a war in the soul between the destructive desires that he called sin or self-love ("self-will run riot" is the Big Book's phrase) and the productive love that goes outward, asking no reward, to other people and, through them, to God. Hyman believes that you can actually see the war in a picture. "I suspect that if I could compare scans of the brain of an alcoholic person before and after treatment in a twelve-step program, you would see clear changes. Of course, the altruistic activity affects the brain as much as a drug does," he said.

Edwards would have been delighted with this idea. It has been said, by the historian Perry Miller, that when Edwards preached he deployed words as an "engine against the brain" in order to stimulate in his hearers a "taste," or "relish," for what he called "divine excellency." The point was to use words to "let . . . light into the soul" by describing vividly the plenitude of nature or the charitable acts of saintly persons or the selfless love of Christ, and thereby to entice the imagination away from its usual focus on worldly glitter. And if Edwards would have liked Hyman's notion that one might actually see pictures of this battle within the soul, he would have loved the metaphoric picture of the lizard brain—of the reptile within getting hold of the leash.

"What A.A. understands is that the essence of dealing with alcoholism is not to blame people for having the disease, yet nevertheless to demand that they take responsibility for themselves," Dr. Hyman said. "That's a hard concept. It is hard to say to somebody, 'Yes, things are terrible, yes, getting to your present condition involved what was done *to* you, and it even has something to do with the body with which you were born, but from this day on we have identified the problem, and you have to be involved in the solution.' " Here is Edwards's formulation of the same compatibility between helplessness and responsibility:

> In order to form their notion of faultiness or blameworthiness, [people] don't wait till they have decided . . . what first determines the will. . . . They don't take any part of their notion of fault or blame from the resolution of any such questions. If this were the case . . . nine hundred and ninety-nine out of a thousand would live and die without having any such notion as that of fault ever entering into their heads, or without so much as once having any conception that anybody was to be either blamed or commended for anything.

Edwards believed that this idea accorded perfectly with common sense. And Bill Wilson, through his experience in Towns Hospital, came to the same conclusion—that "what first determines the will" to drink has nothing to do with the question of who bears responsibility for the consequences of drinking.



FOR much of American history, there seems to have been a consensus that this stringent principle should be applied broadly to the moral life. Among modern Western societies, America has been the country where human beings were most exposed to the possibility of advancement, and least protected from the prospect of decline. It was, in Emerson's phrase, the culture of "self-reliance," in which a man was supposed to take his chances and then collect the reward or pay the price for what he had done or had failed to do.

With the Great Depression, however, this kind of uncompromising individualism became insupportable. For millions of people whose best efforts had availed them nothing, the old doctrine of self-reliance was now experienced as a form of cruelty. At that moment—when the exigencies of the exposed life were judged to be intolerable, and the old stress on individual responsibility had come to seem out of balance with valid claims for individual rights—a profound change took place in America. It was a fusion of the old doctrine of the accountable self with a new kind of public responsibility for the fate of individuals. At the level of politics and public life, this new synthesis came to be known as the New Deal. Under that rubric, the government, mainly through programs that would today be called "workfare," undertook to provide work opportunities for those whom the private economy had abandoned. At the grassroots level, the most important and enduring expression of this same self-help idea was the founding of A.A.

A.A. was a "church" in which rights were kept in steady balance with responsibilities through the mechanisms of free expression and requisite community service. As such, it kept unflinchingly to the Edwardsian principle of what the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr called, in 1939, "responsibility despite inevitability," and at the same time committed itself to providing the unconditional help that all suffering human beings have a right to expect from others. In this sense, A.A. was both a religious revival with roots in an earlier America and a spontaneous expression of the kind of balanced liberalism that emerged in the Roosevelt years.

But the paradoxically symmetrical idea that lies at the heart of A.A.—that helplessness is a fact of human life, yet, at the same time, no one should be spared responsibility for his actions—has proved extremely difficult to sustain. The relation between rights and responsibilities within American liberalism seems to many people to have been thrown out of balance. In response to this apparent distortion, certain liberal institutions (welfare) and ideas (affirmative action) have been charged with misattributing suffering to circumstance rather than to the responsible self. Such an approach to the alleviation of human suffering, its critics say, misleads people into thinking that the world owes them redress, and leaves them in a state of perpetual expectation for a reparation that will never come.

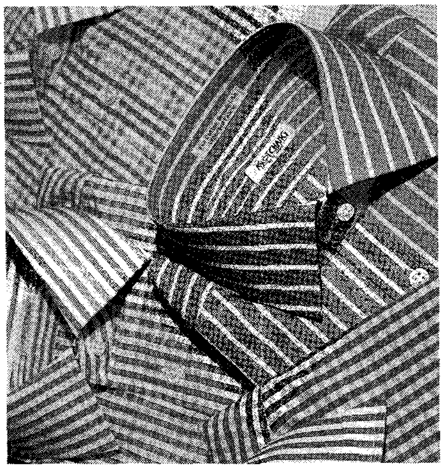
As part of the feeding frenzy on the corpse of liberalism which now passes for political debate, this critique is often a pretext for mean-spirited attacks on "freeloaders"—people who are deemed unworthy beneficiaries of a misguided paternalism. Yet even some defenders of liberalism agree that, at least in such conspicuous areas as criminal law, regulated speech, and normative sexual behavior, American society has moved too far toward rights and away from responsibilities. Some of the more spectacular "don't blame me" defendants who have entertained and disgusted Americans in recent years—Lorena Bobbitt, the Menendez brothers—seem to represent a moral decadence in which a once dignified liberalism has been reduced to the claim that maimers and murderers are entitled to sympathy and exoneration if only they can show that they were victims, too. "The architecture of [their] self-defense plea," as Elizabeth Hardwick has put it, is most often organized around the claim of having suffered sexual abuse—"as pertinent to the therapist," she says, "as a kidney to the urologist." These are people who claim, in contrast to Edwards, that "what determines the will" not only means something but means everything.

It is not surprising that, as this exculpatory idea of the coerced will grows rampant in American life, the balance within A.A. between rights and responsibilities has also shifted. "It's getting harder all the time just to find a volunteer for setting up the coffeepot before the meeting, or scrubbing it out after," one member told us. "The idea of helping others in order to help yourself is in trouble." And some members, pointing to circumstantial factors, remark that the practice of Twelve-Stepping is on the decline. "In the days of Bill and Bob, everyone knew a drunk whom you could seek out and Twelve-Step in what used to be your favorite bar," one member said. "But today they're hidden away in rehab centers and dealt with in a medical setting. The expectation that every A.A. member will seek out someone to help seems to be fading."

There are members who believe that the fellowship actually has begun to break apart into schisms. On the one side, there are the proliferating victim groups ("Shoplifters Anonymous, Tight-Shoes Anonymous, Edsel-Owners Anonymous" was the list offered by Marc Galanter), a sort of endless Oprah Winfrey show that claims the A.A. Twelve Step method as its inspiration, but in which the real meaning of the Twelfth Step is lost amid an incessant whine about the injured self. "There's been an influx of doubletalk from these groups," one veteran remarked. "I've heard about an A.A. meeting in New Jersey where the old-timers have taken to yelling out 'Tough shit, don't drink!' whenever the whiners get started."

On the other side, there is a rival group, called Rational Recovery, which began in 1986 and publishes a guide entitled "The Small Book," in which the addict is promised "sobriety . . . without depending on other people or Higher Powers to help you out." This dilute version of the A.A. original seems, to A.A. true believers, a vestigial church, where members make no real commitment to helping others, yet refuse to face the irremediable loneliness of helping only themselves.

How A.A. will respond to these challenges remains an open—and for many members an urgent—question. It is a fellowship based on the proposition that human beings can overcome their existential fear only by recognizing their responsibility for themselves *and* their obligations to others. To contemplate the history and the destiny of this idea in a culture that seems to be losing its grasp of it is to understand what Bill Wilson meant when he wrote that "bottles were only a symbol" of the endless human struggle against self-deception. ♦



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LETTER FROM MOGADISHU

A WORLD OF DUST

The U.N. pulled out of Somalia leaving no one in charge. There is no government, no law, and no formal education—just a rampant wild-frontier economy in which anything can be had for a price. Is this the future?

BY WILLIAM FINNEGAN

IN the Hobbesian gangland of this ruined city, I find it dimly encouraging that Anogeel, a young Somali newspaper owner and editor, actively hates the burned-out battle tank parked outside his house in the back blocks of the Bar-Ubax neighborhood. The tank dates from what everybody here calls "Siad Barre times," by which they mean the twenty-one-year dictatorship of Mohamed Siad Barre. Anogeel, as it happened, interviewed the guerrilla who destroyed the tank (with a bazooka stolen from the Army) during the mass urban uprising that finally toppled Siad Barre, in January, 1991. And yet Anogeel refuses to see the tank as a heroic relic, a monument to the popular victory over the dictatorship, because "it is a weapon, and it is weapons that have destroyed our country." When he said this, he pulled in his chin and wrinkled his nose in a vivid, unself-conscious expression of pure disgust.

We were sitting in his newsroom, which is simply the front room of his house. It was a hot afternoon, and the street outside was quiet. Bar-Ubax has a sleepy, timeless, tumbledown quality: little pastel houses blending seamlessly into red sand roads under rows of short, thick-trunked shade trees. Through the window I could see a donkey cart, driven by a sinewy man in a dirty turban, trundling slowly past the burned-out tank.

Elsewhere in the city, there was plenty of tension, however. These were the final days of the once immense United Nations Operation in Somalia, and the multinational intervention forces had pulled back into a tiny, bleak redoubt on the seafront, from which they were now trying to withdraw by plane and ship, with the help of American and Italian troops. Crowds were gathering outside the razor wire, hoping to carry off anything left behind, and outraged at all the stuff being crated up and taken away. More ominously, the city's two largest militias were said to be preparing to fight for control of the port and the airport. The last time these two militias fought, they destroyed much of Mogadishu. As many as thirty thousand people are said to have died in a single three-month shelling duel between them. By the time the fight ended, in early 1992, whole neighborhoods, along with the entire downtown shopping-and-business district, had been levelled. Those parts of the city still look like postwar Dresden or Warsaw.

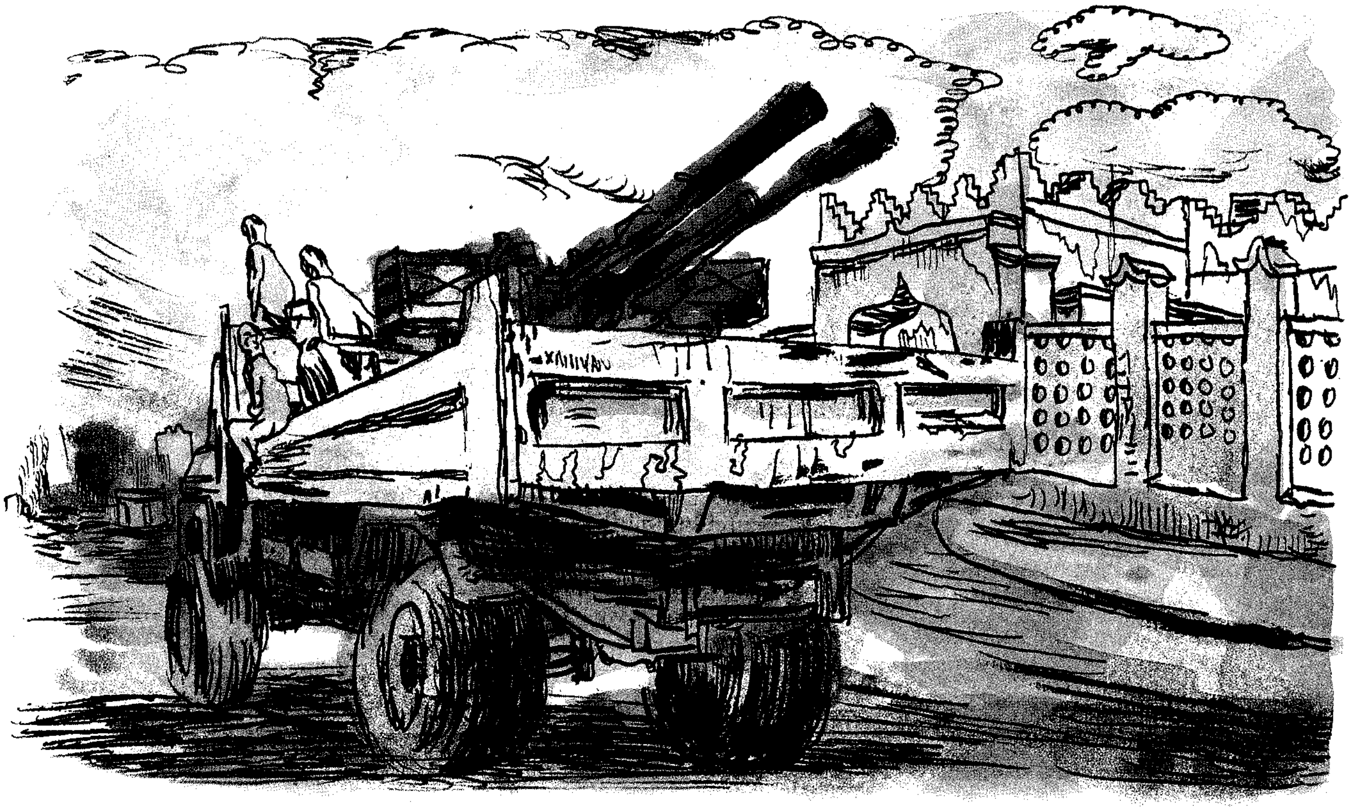
Anogeel and his family actually fled for their lives to Bar-Ubax during the early days of that battle, for the two feuding militias—which were originally part of the alliance that overthrew Siad Barre—are clan based, and Bar-Ubax is one of the strongholds of a clan called the Habar Gidir, to which Anogeel belongs by birth. That period was also the beginning of the great famine, which in 1992 devastated southern Somalia, killing an estimated three hundred thousand. Like everyone who was in Mogadishu then, Anogeel remembers the hungry mobs that thronged the city. "If you ate a banana and dropped the peel on the ground, it would not stay there one minute," he told me quietly. "Someone would pick it up and eat it. I myself saw two people who starved to death just here." He pointed toward the street.

Somalia has made a remarkable, if uneven, economic comeback since those desperate days. Harvests have been plentiful, hunger has been banished, and trade is brisk in the towns and cities. In Mogadishu, the old Bakara Market, a traditional bazaar near Anogeel's house, has effectively replaced the destroyed Italian-colonial downtown. The market has been growing wildly, in fact, swallowing entire neighborhoods with each passing month. Test-firing chatters incessantly from the market's weapons section. Its money changers take personal checks from anywhere in the world. Anything, people like to say, is now available at Bakara for a price, and Somali businessmen regularly fly off in small planes from dirt airstrips near Mogadishu carrying suitcases of cash to their bankers in Dubai and Djibouti. Some of the goods and much of the hard currency in circulation are here courtesy of the United Nations mission, but the economy clearly has a momentum of its own.

What Somalia is still missing is a government. It has now gone more than four years without one. Nobody quite believed until recently that the United Nations would really quit the country without leaving behind at least a nominal government. But it has. The major clan factions, which are now hopelessly splintered and are only half in control of their militias, have simply been unable to consolidate power since the fall of Siad Barre.

Having no government has not been all bad. It gave Anogeel a chance to start his newspaper, for instance—something he could never have done under the dictatorship. He had lost his job in the Ministry of Finance when it, like every other ministry, ceased to exist. "So that was my chance to pursue my original interest," he said, smiling. He launched *Xog-Ogaal*—the paper's name is Somali for "well informed but discreet"—in June, 1991, and it has been going strong ever since.

Anogeel's real name is Mohamed Aden Guled, but hardly anyone in Mogadishu seems to know that. Anogeel is his nickname; it means "camel's milk." Many Somalis, including public figures, go by their nicknames, even in Mogadishu, a city of a million people; it's a rural custom carried over to town. Thus Osman Hassan Ali, one of the wealthiest, most powerful men in the country, is universally known as Ato, meaning "skinny," and at least half the men one meets seem to be called Dheere, which means "tall." Anogeel got his name from an uncle who came looking for him at a village school in the Mudug, the arid central rangelands, where he grew up. This uncle, who had been a nomad—about half of the Somalis are nomads still, driving their camels, cattle, goats, and sheep on vast, intricate migrations—had never met his nephew, and, when he first saw him, wonderingly compared the boy's fair hair to camel's milk. The simile stuck, though Anogeel's hair soon darkened.



GARY PANTER

Today, he is twenty-seven, black-skinned, wavy-haired, hook-nosed, with a mixture, common in Somalia but striking elsewhere, of African- and Arab-looking features. Wide-bottomed and long-armed, he seems already profoundly middle-aged. He has two young daughters and is a devout Muslim. He is well educated but deeply provincial, never having travelled beyond Ethiopia and Saudi Arabia. He is also priggish. When he disapproves of something, he makes a face of such sour righteousness that for a moment you think he must be joking. He isn't, though, and the effect is almost charming. His command of English is extensive yet seems to be entirely booklearned, for he comes up with some baffling pronunciations: "a load" for "allowed," "our tickles" for "articles."

Xog-Ogaal was part of a general blossoming of the local press. "Somalis are information junkies," I was told by Michael Maren, an American journalist who lived here in the nineteen-eighties. "Somali exiles are all over the Internet." The national fascination with news is often said to derive from the nomadic life, where a standard greeting on the trail is "What news?" The BBC's Somali-language radio service is a countrywide obsession. I have seen crowds gather at every tea-shop window in a small northern town at dusk, hushed to listen to the daily broadcast, which can usually fuel an evening's discussion. After the fall of the dictatorship, newspapers sprang up in major towns. Mogadishu today has at least half a dozen. Most are aligned with a political faction—and each of the city's two radio stations is firmly controlled by one of the two main factions. *Xog-Ogaal*, however, is nonaligned. This independence—particularly as it is expressed by the paper's staff cartoonist, Alif, who produces biting caricatures of all the major actors in the Somalian melodrama—is obviously popular with the reading public. Anogeel reckons that his daily press run of between two and three thousand reaches as many as a hundred thousand readers, and from what I have seen of the paper's hand-to-hand circulation through the streets of Mogadishu I believe he may be right. One sees Alif cartoons taped to walls in shops throughout the city.

The physical obstacles to publishing a newspaper in a country without a phone system, without a post office, without public electricity, and with its few highways plagued by bandits are formidable. The *Xog-Ogaal* masthead carries a post-office box number, but that is merely a wishful gesture. Ad copy, letters from readers, and other correspondence arrive by hand. While Anogeel and I sat talking in his newsroom recently, he fielded a steady traffic of couriered items—paid notices about the opening of a new pharmacy and a new satellite-communications center; the influential Ato's reply to a local imam's criticism of his earlier remarks about the place of religion in politics—and filed them in his shirt pocket. To get in touch with his correspondents outside Mogadishu, he said, he rents time on a high-frequency radio at a hotel in Bar-Ubax—"they give us discount." To get copies of *Xog-Ogaal* to readers outside the city, or outside the country, he relies on the "khat planes," which are the closest thing to scheduled flights in and out of Mogadishu. (Khat, a shrub whose stalks, when chewed, are a mild stimulant, is extremely popular throughout Somalia. Since it is grown mainly in Kenya and Ethiopia, and is potent only when fresh, it is normally transported by air, with some urgency.) Anogeel sends free copies by khat-mail every day to Nairobi for distribution among the Somali exiles there.

The newspaper is produced entirely in the grimy front room of Anogeel's house: eight stapled pages, mimeographed and bulk-copied nightly on rugged machines that look as if they might have fallen off a United Nations truck. Electricity is supplied by two small, gas-powered generators on the porch. News photographs of local and foreign leaders are taped to the walls: models for Alif. Ten reporters come and go, knocking out stories on a single, early-vintage Olivetti personal computer. Some of the opinion columnists don't sign their pieces, or else use pseudonyms, out of fear of the clan factions, but Anogeel has lost only one reporter to political violence—a young woman killed in the street, apparently by a stray bullet, in 1992. She was the editor of the paper's education supplement, which still runs on Tuesdays.

Describing his operation, Anogeel seemed proudest, I thought, of the newsboys he employs—a hundred and ninety of them. He personally delivers papers to them each day at dawn at six distribution points around the city. "That's a hundred and ninety boys with jobs," he said intensely. "One hundred and ninety boys *not fighting*."

His pride in keeping his newsboys out of combat is understandable. Unemployed young men in Somalia, and particularly in Mogadishu, tend to become *mooryaan:* gunmen. With some two million assault rifles in circulation in the city, it is simply the easiest way to eat. It is also, I imagine, one of the more satisfying positions to occupy in a society being nakedly ruled by the gun. Indeed, the king of the streets since Siad Barre's time has been the futuristic battlewagon known as a "technical"—a Land Cruiser or a pickup with the cab sawed off and an anti-aircraft machine gun or a large-calibre recoilless rifle mounted on the back. I have watched the triggerman on a passing technical surveying his domain and found myself wondering what it must be like to travel the blasted city with a cannon between your knees.

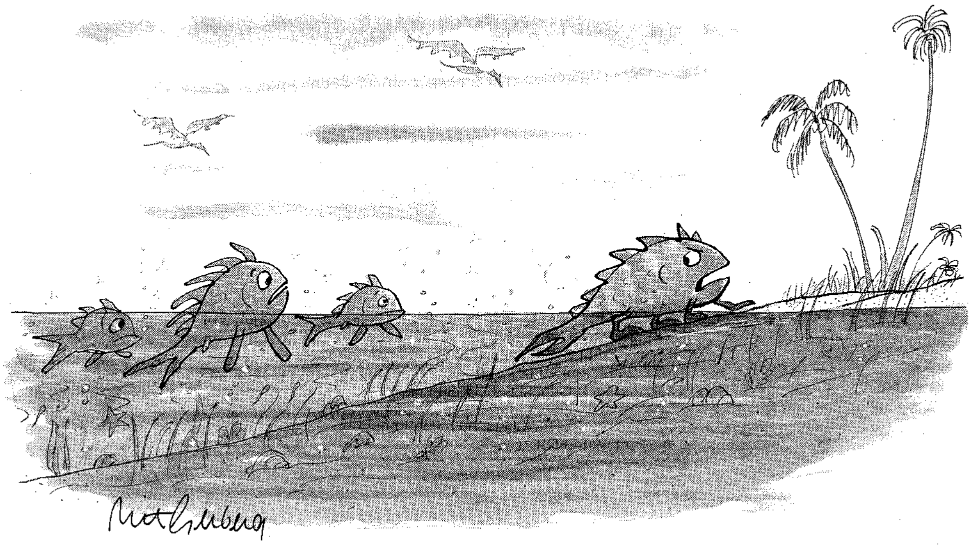
Some unknown percentage of the gunmen are loyal to clan-faction leaders, or warlords: these gunmen constitute the bulk of the standing militias. The rest are mercenaries, willing to fight for money or khat. Thousands worked for United Nations agencies as "security," and are now presumably unemployed.

General Mohamed Farah Aidid commands the most aggressive and visible militia in Mogadishu—probably in all of Somalia. He was a diplomat and soldier under Siad Barre, and is determined to become the next dictator. Aidid's main rival is a former businessman named Ali Mahdi Mohamed, whose Abgaal-clan militia controls the northern part of Mogadishu. It was Aidid and Ali Mahdi who reduced much of the city to rubble in 1991 and 1992.

General Aidid belongs, like Anogeel, to the Habar Gidir clan. But Anogeel's newspaper has regularly enraged the Aidid camp with its critical reporting. As a result, Anogeel has received many death threats, and in 1993 there was a serious attempt on his life. The would-be assassin was apprehended, and confessed, according to Anogeel, that he had been hired by a minor warlord named Qaylaweyne (Big Noise). Qaylaweyne is also a Habar Gidir, and he had apparently been working for a member of Aidid's inner circle.

So clan is clearly not much protection in these matters, and neither is "clan family," a larger patrilineal grouping: Aidid's Habar Gidir and Ali Mahdi's Abgaal are both from the Hawiye clan family. Subclan affiliation may be more help. At least, when I spoke to the leading elder of Anogeel's subclan, which is called the Sulaymaan and is known for its ferocity, he told me that the subclan was proud of Anogeel, and that Aidid, who comes from a different subclan, was now aware that anyone who harmed Anogeel would have to reckon with the Sulaymaan.

Anogeel himself is scathing on the subject of what he calls "tribalism." Among his reporters, he told me, are members of eight different clans, from four of the six main Somali clan families. Siad Barre, he says, cynically used tribalism to divide his opponents and shore up his power, and then his opponents "made the same mistake, but much worse." Anogeel had been living in an Abgaal neighborhood when he was forced to move his family to Bar-Ubax. But he seems otherwise undaunted by the threats he faces.



"Because I've already said all I can say in this particular medium."

"The warlords are the AIDS of Somalia," he told me. He repeated the remark, then checked my notebook to make sure I had it right.

I asked if the departure of the United Nations peacekeepers would make any difference to his safety.

Possibly, he said, although four Somali journalists who worked on a paper put out by the United Nations mission were executed in July, 1993, allegedly by Aidid loyalists, for having offended the Aidid faction. So United Nations protection, even at the height of the intervention, had never been worth much. The main effect of the pullout on *Xog-Ogaal* would probably be a rise in the price of paper once all the looted U.N. paper in the city ran out. And, if the port closed because of faction fighting, the paper would lose the shipping news, which was its most reliable paid space.

I asked if *Xog-Ogaal* had ever received funding from Islamic sources.

Anogeel frowned, and said, "No. Then we could not be neutral. I would rather use these old machines and be free."

I could not tell whether I had offended him.

Outside, a strangled-sounding muezzin began to wail. It was late afternoon; Anogeel would soon have to go and pray. Because this was the Ramadan holiday period, he had been fasting since daybreak. And yet thirst and hunger seemed to have remarkably little effect on his patience and good spirits. I had noticed the same thing about many Somalis who were fasting.

Anogeel did have a slightly abstracted air, but that, in my experience, he had at all times. I tended to ascribe it to the complex calculations that I imagined he must have to make constantly among the hopelessly diverse values he holds dear: those of Islam, whose truth flows from the Koran; those of the Somali clans, whose elders reinterpret the elaborate oral traditions of pastoralist nomads to settle modern-day feuds; and the human-rights liberalism of an independent journalist. His social attitudes are certainly rife with contradictions. For instance, he supports the Islamic *shariah* courts that are flourishing here, flogging and stoning people for blasphemy and adultery, and simultaneously fights for the idea of a Western-style uncensored press. Similarly, he promotes a women's-rights group that, like the press, has bloomed in the free-for-all of the interregnum, and yet he opposes gender equality. "In Somalia, our tradition says that if you kill a man you must pay his family compensation of a hundred camels, but if you kill a woman you must pay only fifty camels," he told me, his face prim and unreadable. "And I agree with that."

I left, so that he could pray.

A WINTER'S NIGHT

The outside, where the snow
Is softly and soundlessly
Falling (there is no wind
Tonight) has brought its quiet
Into the house that was noisy
All day with TV voices,
The telephone ringing,
And the happy shouts of children
Romping from room to room.
Now, except for me, sleep
Has taken over the house.
I bring the silence of the dark
Outside into it. I wrap that
Around my cares. Soon I, too,
Will be sleeping.

—JAMES LAUGHLIN

ANOGEEL is right about what weapons have done to Somalia. The Siad Barre regime saw to it that arms poured into the country throughout the latter half of the Cold War, first from the Soviet Union, then from the United States. It was a virulent variation on the standard pattern: the superpowers saw Somalia, crouched on the Horn of Africa and overlooking the approach to the Red Sea and the Suez Canal, as an important strategic asset, while Siad Barre relied increasingly on terror for his survival. The result was a country with an unusual ability to tear itself apart when the time was ripe. A revolt in the northwest in 1988 gave a preview of what was to come: Siad Barre responded with an aerial bombardment of two towns, including the provincial capital, Hargeysa, which was flattened. Fifty thousand died. The civil war that ultimately toppled the regime began the next year. By the time Siad Barre fell, two years later, much of the country was in ruins.

The alliance that overthrew Siad Barre had no dominant figure who survived, and the outside world, perhaps distracted by the Gulf War, did not try to broker a settlement. Indeed, the United Nations retained no presence whatever in Somalia for nearly a year after Siad Barre fell. And the United States had previously renounced its geostrategic stake in the region. After a few months, still heavily armed, the strongest clan militias began to fight.

Meanwhile, Siad Barre's forces, having regrouped along the border with Kenya, were attempting a comeback, and at one point battled their way to within twenty miles of Mogadishu. The famine of 1992 was the direct result of this fighting in the south. Unlike the rest of the country, southern Somalia is well watered, and for that reason it is inhabited predominantly by farmers, not nomads. The agriculturalist clans are no match militarily for their nomadic countrymen, who have always formed the bulk of the armies fighting the civil war and, hungry themselves, have systematically robbed the farming clans and driven them off their lands. Poor rainfall exacerbated the plight of the farmers: they began to starve en masse. Relief efforts were hampered by the fighting, and by increasingly brazen looting and blackmail by the armed parties, with General Aidid's forces controlling much of the famine zone. International press coverage of this impasse, and particularly the harrowing images of starving children, finally provoked, in December, 1992, the great multinational intervention, led by the United States, to open relief-supply routes. In truth, the famine was already receding by then—death rates had been dropping for months—but the intervention did hasten the region's recovery, saving, at least by the reckoning of its proponents, more than a hundred thousand lives.

The intervention also stopped the banditry in much of southern Somalia. To read reports from the early days of the intervention is horribly sad now, for they are full of the euphoria of war-weary Somalis at the return of a semblance of peace. The power of the warlords had been broken, many said. Plans to disarm the warring factions were initiated. They were never carried through, however, and most of the American soldiers, who constituted the backbone of the intervention—twenty-five thousand troops in an international force of about thirty thousand—left Somalia in April, 1993. Victor Gbeho, the last of several United Nations "special representatives" to Somalia, told me recently, "We should have had the courage to do the disarmament. The Somalis expected it, and it would have been possible." But Gbeho's own spokesman, George Bennett, disagrees. There were just too many weapons around, he says, and the warlords could always have bought new ones.

In any event, soon after the United Nations took command of the operation, in May, 1993, it began to go sour. General Aidid's forces attacked Pakistani troops in Mogadishu in June, and Admiral Jonathan Howe, then the U.N. envoy, ordered Aidid's arrest, putting a price of twenty-five thousand dollars on his head. Aidid defied the U.N., gaining public support by aligning himself with a history of Somalian resistance to Italian, British, and Ethiopian colonizers. The remaining American airborne units led the increasingly violent search for Aidid, bombing and strafing suspected hideouts, and killing more than a thousand civilians. One disastrous raid in October left eighteen U.S. Army Rangers dead and seventy-five wounded, and after that the Americans effectively withdrew from the fray. Aidid was never captured, and the United Nations military profile was steadily lowered.

On the political side, the United Nations tried to help rebuild government at the grass roots through district councils composed of local "leaders," but in most places it found itself lost among the endless subclans and eddies of local power. The United Nations' efforts to broker a peace agreement between the major clans were, of course, also unavailing. It seemed that neither Aidid nor Ali Mahdi would accept anything less than the Presidency. Having built up Aidid politically through its pursuit of him, the United Nations built him up further, after taking the price off his head, by dealing with him as though he controlled areas of the country which he did not in fact control. The U.N., which had earlier preferred Ali Mahdi, seemed to be hoping to create a strongman to hand Somalia over to. And yet the buildup of Aidid was not enough to shift the balance of power decisively in his favor, and by the end of its Somalia mission the United Nations was openly preferring Ali Mahdi again.

Where the U.N. continued to function, it tended to spawn large colonies of clients. Thus, by 1994 there were estimated to be in Mogadishu alone more than a thousand "local N.G.O.s"—nongovernmental organizations, set up by Somalis to channel foreign funds into worthy projects like orphanages and literacy training. What fraction of these projects might be legitimate was impossible to determine, but it was widely thought to be small. The direct U.N. payroll, meanwhile, was immense. By the end of its mission, the U.N. was easily the biggest employer in Somalia. Counting dependents, it was supporting, according to some estimates, a hundred thousand people in Mogadishu. And rumor had it that a significant tax was being collected from those wages by the warlords, who were grimly rearming.

Even the U.N.'s ostensible main purpose in Somalia—to help the country form a government—seemed at times quite out of synch with the facts on the ground. Many of the nicer houses still standing in south Mogadishu, for instance, are being inhabited by people who do not legally own them—*mooryaan* from the countryside, mostly, enjoying their first sojourn in the city. What interest do these young fighters have in peace and reconciliation? A government might permit homeowners to return and evict them. A government might restore law and order, reducing the demand for their services as gunmen. They might even be forced to go back to the countryside, back to their camels and sheep. Then, there are all the businessmen who are doing very nicely in the current, low-tax climate. Some of them are indistinguishable from the warlords (whom they must accommodate, in any event). The U.N., sponsoring its endless, expensive peace conferences in Addis Ababa and Nairobi, often seemed entirely unaware of this kind of structural resistance to the solving of the Somalian conundrum.

Somalia turned into one of the biggest, most expensive projects in U.N. history. The final bill came to more than two billion dollars. The mission could have lasted longer than it did, but once it became clear that "institution building" was going nowhere and that democratic elections would never be held, Security Council support evaporated. The mission's failure was not only political and military but administrative: the Somalia operation became notoriously corrupt (U.N. contracts and equipment, including vehicles, were simply for sale, particularly after the Americans left, in early 1994) and astoundingly wasteful (the U.N. compound in Mogadishu was rebuilt at a cost of more than fifty million dollars and then, in early February, was abandoned to looters). The subsequent reluctance of U.N. members to contribute to new peacekeeping missions, such as the desperately undersubscribed project in Rwanda, can be substantially attributed to the Somalia fiasco. More broadly, the type of aggressive international intervention to stop civilian suffering and establish civil authority—overriding traditional concerns about national sovereignty—which was pioneered by the Somalia mission and was regularly touted by U.N. Secretary-

"And do you, Deborah Tannen, think they know what they're talking about?"

General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, has been badly discredited. The United States, for its part, felt far less enthusiasm for working with the United Nations—and for international rescue missions in general—by the time it left Somalia than it had felt when the troops arrived, in the heady days of 1992.

ONE of the Somali businessmen who are reputed to have done well in the radical instability of recent times is Osman Hassan Ali, the man widely known as Ato. Customarily described in the Western press as General Aidid's "chief financier," Ato lives in the sort of once wealthy Mogadishu neighborhood where wide streets are littered with smashed, rusting fuel tanks and truck chassis that can be quickly assembled into serious roadblocks. Today, the high compound walls in neighborhoods like Ato's can have almost anything behind them. Some enclose centers for displaced people: dense, unhealthy collections of dome-shaped, burlap-covered *ochols*. Others hide encampments of small militias: ragged fighters sleeping in the weeds around their precious technicals. A few, which are heavily guarded, still contain comfortable villas, wooden-shuttered and bougainvillea-lush. Ato lives in one of these, behind a high cream-colored wall.

Not long ago, I spent an evening at his place. Four or five of us, all men, sat on the living-room floor on Persian rugs, leaning against sofas and chairs, eating camel meat and goat with our fingers, drinking tea, chewing khat. Ato, who looks to be about fifty, is tall and powerfully built—his "skinny" period must have been long ago. His left leg, which was injured last year in a land-mine explosion, was heavily bandaged and seemed to be causing him pain. He was a genial host nonetheless.

Ato's longtime ally General Aidid is uneasy around reporters, so Ato, who is relatively approachable (Michael Maren, who had introduced me to Ato, was also on hand that evening), has often served as the public voice of Aidid's faction. But Ato and Aidid have developed sharp political differences. As members of the same subclan, they are unlikely to become deadly foes, yet the loss of Ato's support could prove disastrous for Aidid, since Ato is, among other things, one of Somalia's biggest khat importers, and the loyalty of a warlord's troops is closely related to his ability to keep them supplied with khat. Ato is also said to own the largest fleet of technicals in the country—another strategic high card.

There was some well-informed talk about American politics that evening. I was sitting beside Mohamed Hassan Awale, another estranged Aidid adviser, who had lived for many years in the United States and seemed to know more about the Republican Party than I do. He and Ato reminisced about their adventures together in New York City. Then Ato brought out albums of photographs documenting the destruction of a Mogadishu truck compound he owns. It had been bombed to bits by the Americans in 1993. The photographs showed none of the thousands of technicals that the Americans claimed were built in the compound. Ato said he was in the market for an American lawyer. He planned to sue for damages.

Ato and Awale also reminisced about the four months they had spent in U.N. captivity in 1993. "Never charged," Awale said. "No habeas corpus." They were held, they said, with one other prisoner, on an island off southern Somalia. "Our Robben Island," Awale said dryly.

A quiet older man who ate with us was introduced as Abdi Qeybdiid, the

Doctor Teflon & Mister Velcro

owner of a house that was destroyed in a fierce American air raid in July, 1993. The Red Cross later said that fifty-four civilians were killed in that attack, many of them clan elders attending a meeting. The Americans had apparently thought that Aidid would be at the meeting. Four foreign journalists who went to the scene shortly after the attack were killed by an angry mob. (Aidid's radio station reported that the journalists were C.I.A. agents, and Anogeel told me that *Xog-Ogaal* came under pressure to make the same insane accusation. He refused, of course, and reported the story straight.)

Despite the impending lawsuits, Ato's relations with the Americans were now warm again, he said, just as they had been before the civil war. The managers of Conoco, the American oil company, had asked him to look after their local facilities, and he was doing so. He had assured the United States government and military that he would try to help keep the final U.N. withdrawal peaceful. Aidid might try to rouse public fears with warnings about American plans to "recolonize" Somalia, but Ato would counsel calm. Lately, he said, he had been in constant contact with Ali Mahdi's group, and he was now in a position to say that the transfer of the airport and the seaport from U.N. control to Somali control would be uneventful. Looters would be kept at bay, and there would be joint management of both facilities by both militias. Nobody wanted to see the port or the airport shut down again—not even Aidid. Indeed, Ato was so confident that the transfer would be orderly that he planned to spend part of the withdrawal period on a United States Navy ship offshore, where an American doctor had agreed to remove the pins from his injured ankle.

I seemed to be the only person there who found this image amusing. Perhaps it was the khat.

Throughout the evening, small groups of men came in, sat with us, talked for a few minutes with Ato, and left. Awale translated some of the conversations for me. Most of the groups were delegations, it seemed, from a council of subclan elders that was meeting nearby. The elders were trying to settle various points of contention between Ato and Aidid. Arguments from both sides had already been heard. These visits were to offer progress reports or to attain clarifications. Awale described for me in some detail a set of countrywide clan alliances that he and Ato had proposed as the best way for the Habar Gidir to consolidate power in the post-U.N. period, and outflank Ali Mahdi. Aidid had a narrower, more military strategy, apparently. (But the plan that Awale described stood in sharp contrast to the goals that Ali Mahdi and his advisers outlined when I interviewed them. "Once we have justice and democracy in Somalia, the clan system will disappear," Ali Mahdi said. He struck me as a pleasant man, but I had to fight to stay awake while he and his men regaled me with lectures about human rights. Ato's interlocking clan alliances seemed like a more plausible political blueprint. And Ali Mahdi's wife, it was useful to recall, had been Siad Barre's legal adviser.)

The subclan elders meeting nearby were a reminder that, even while Somalia has no government, a great deal of political decision-making does get done, most of it far from Mogadishu and indistinguishable from what goes on—elders solving problems, settling local disputes—when there *is* a government. The elders' meeting was also a reminder, though, that a distinction often made by critics of the intervention, who contended that the U.N. should have been dealing with clan elders rather than with warlords and politicians, was largely false. That is because a great many elders work closely with the warlords—just as many worked with the Siad Barre regime. The image of wise, community-minded, uncorrupted elders is seductive but ill-founded. Some well-informed (but discreet) observers, including Anogeel, even lay a large portion of the blame for the civil war at the feet of the elders, some of whom have been all too willing to help fill the armed ranks of the warlords with illiterate youths from their rural domains.

To an outsider, the most striking thing about the clan and political business being conducted at Ato's that evening was the lack of visible deference being shown, even by the most junior members of the various delegations, to Ato himself. It is an aspect of Somali society often noted: though some clans use Arabic terms like "sultan" to describe their leaders, the strict hierarchical relations that characterize most Middle Eastern societies are absent. There are titular royal families and stronger and weaker clans and much racial condescension toward the more Negroid Somali Bantu minority in the south, but the sharpest distinguishing feature of Somali society remains its egalitarianism. This proto-democracy has its roots in the hard, proud life of the nomad, who, if his herd is large and healthy, reckons himself as rich as any merchant.

Ato started talking at one point about his childhood—how he got his first break at the age of thirteen, when he was working as a laborer for an oil-company search crew. The bulldozer operator, an Italian, got hurt, and Ato jumped into his seat and showed that he could operate the rig. An American millionaire, I thought, might have told the story as an illustration of the American Dream: humble origins, moxie, and the rest. But Ato's moral seemed to lie elsewhere: something about how the complexities of machinery are overrated. Certainly nobody seemed to find it odd that this tycoon had once been a manual laborer.

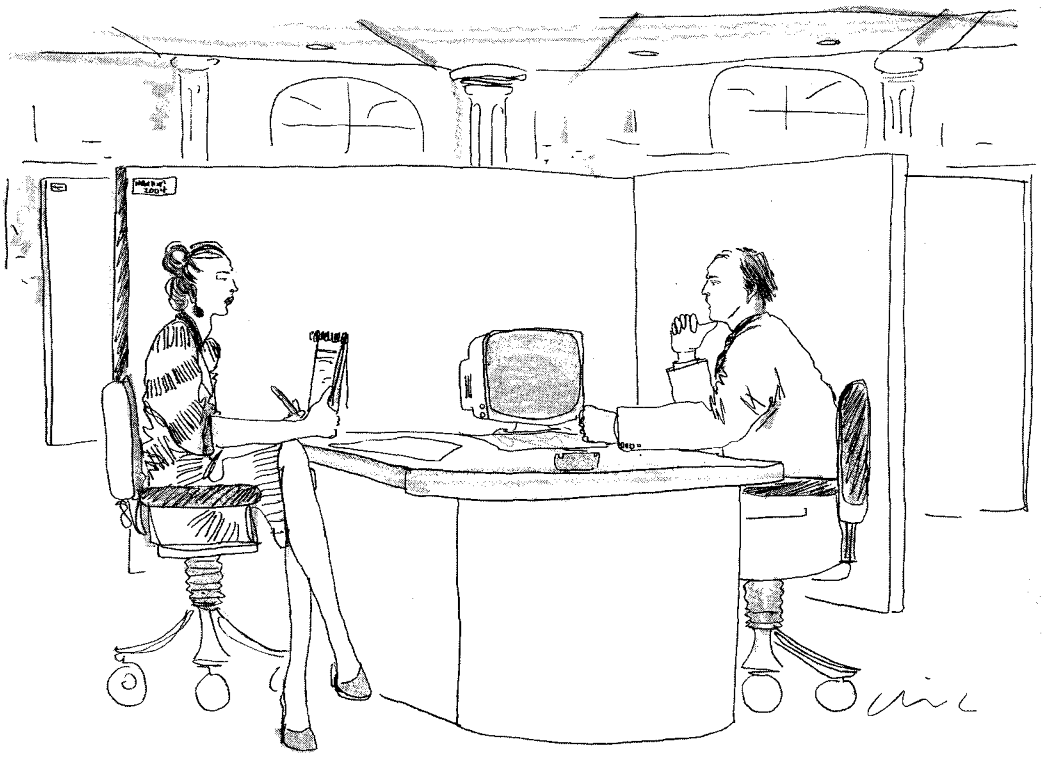
Although much of the local political discussion that evening—the sub-subclan level of affairs—flew past me, I did make one startling connection. Abdi Qeybdiid, the quiet man whose house had been destroyed by the Americans, was also, I realized, the man who had allegedly directed Qaylaweyne to have Anogeel assassinated. This was not a state secret. In fact, a few days before the assassination attempt Qeybdiid had stood on a stage at an Aidid rally and publicly torn up a copy of *Xog-Ogaal*, urging members of the crowd to do the same. Now I studied Qeybdiid, who was thoughtfully sipping his tea. I should have been more disturbed than I was. Again, it was probably the khat.

At the end of the evening, Ato sent Maren and me back to our hotel in one of his cars, accompanied by a dozen gunmen and a state-of-the-art technical. For a few minutes, flashing through the lightless streets, it felt as if we owned the city.

In the worldwide ideological migration away from statism and toward unfettered markets, Somalia may be seen as a sort of battered advance scout. Taxes could not be lower, regulation less onerous. Everything is privatized. "In ten years' time, you'll be able to buy fucking *plutonium* in Bakara Market," a British wire-service correspondent with long experience in Somalia says. "The streets of Mogadishu will be ruled by *monster* technicals." Hans Magnus Enzensberger's description of modern civil wars—"The unprecedented comes into sudden and explosive contact with the atavistic"—seems ever more apt in Somalia.

Wild-frontier capitalism is already operating where conditions allow. Thus multinational corporations, including the Dole Food Company and the Italian-owned Somalfruit Company, have been battling for control of a swath of lucrative banana plantations south of Mogadishu. (This battle has been literal, and Marcello Palmisano, an Italian journalist, was caught in the crossfire on February 9th. Gunmen allegedly working for a subsidiary of Dole apparently mistook him for an executive of Somalfruit, and executed him outside the Mogadishu airport. Dole denied responsibility.) I have seen the northern port of Boosaaso—where civil peace has reigned since a group of fractious Islamic fundamentalists were run off by local clan militias in 1993—jammed with big diesel-powered dhows in from Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and the United Arab Emirates, which were loading livestock at a furious rate. Somali goats, camels, cattle, and black-headed sheep are highly valued in the Middle East, and livestock exports have long been the country's leading earner of hard currency. The one problem with shipping around Boosaaso now is pirates: they like to board foreign vessels by claiming to be the "coast guard" of a semi-fictitious regional authority, and then levy huge fines for the violation of obscure laws.

The lack of ordinary, tax-supported public services does lead, as in the Republican fantasy, to a certain amount of voluntarism. Travelling from Mogadishu to Jowhar on a highway that is mostly in a disastrous state of repair, I noticed my translator shoving thousand-shilling notes out the car window—disintegrating leftovers from Siad Barre times, they are worth about



"To Randall Piersault, vice-president for Mergers and Acquisitions. Dear Randy: Shall we dance?"

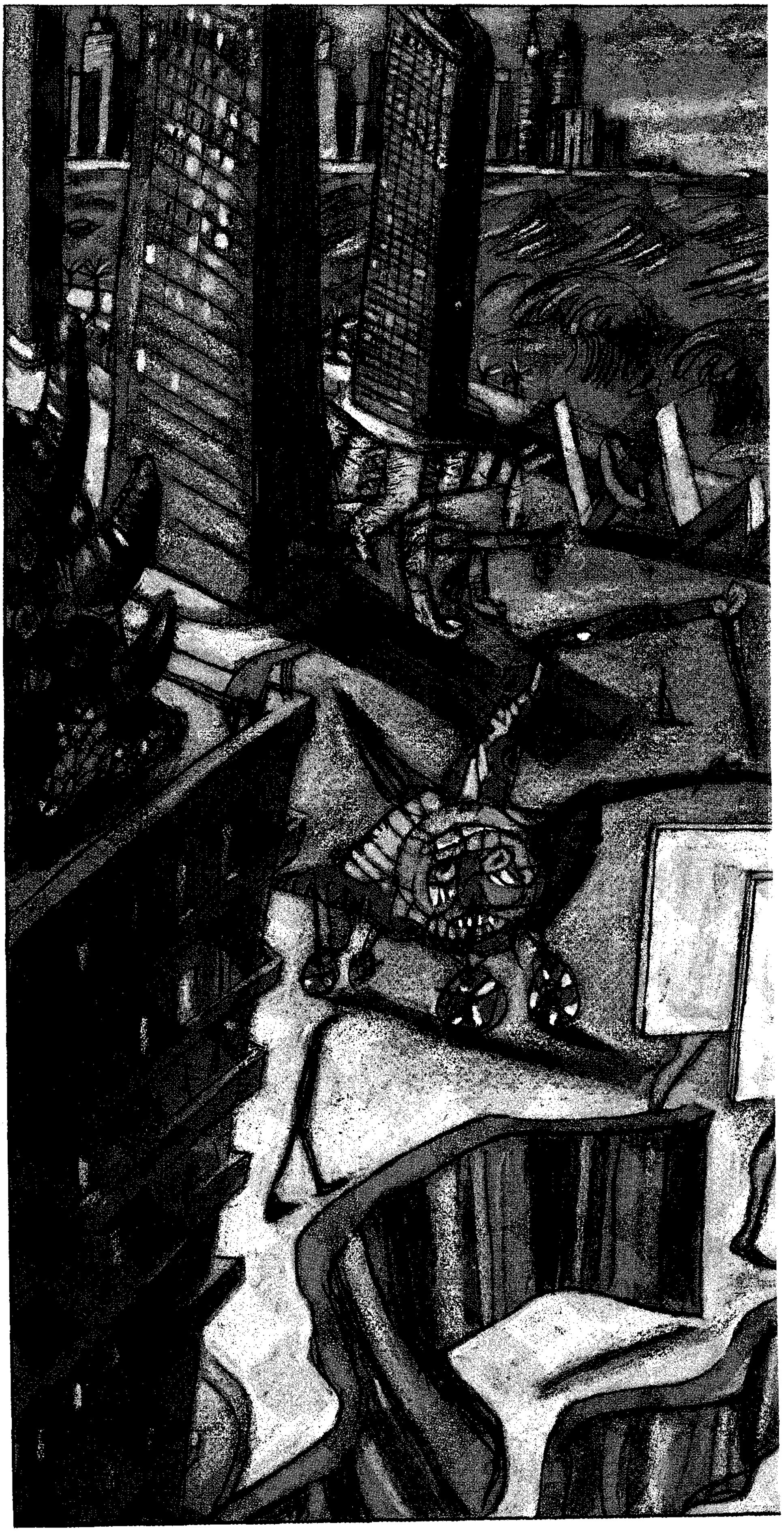
fifteen cents each—whenever we passed a dusty laborer patching the road with a shovel and a bucket. "It is to encourage them," he said. "I went to Merka with an Arab diplomat who threw out *bundles* of Somalian shillings whenever he saw someone maintaining the road."

A more popular enterprise among those who live alongside Somalian highways, however, is the erection of roadblocks for the collection of tolls. This is *not* the sort of effort one wants to encourage, and so one's escorts routinely make a show of force—eight or ten assault rifles, a rocket-propelled grenade launcher, and a belt-fed machine gun in the case of that trip to Jowhar—at roadblocks to persuade the toll collectors to move their rocks out of one's way. (The personal-security business has been an economic growth sector, clearly. It is also a seller's market: when you are told you need twenty gunmen and a technical to go safely where you want to go, your bargaining position is weak by definition.)

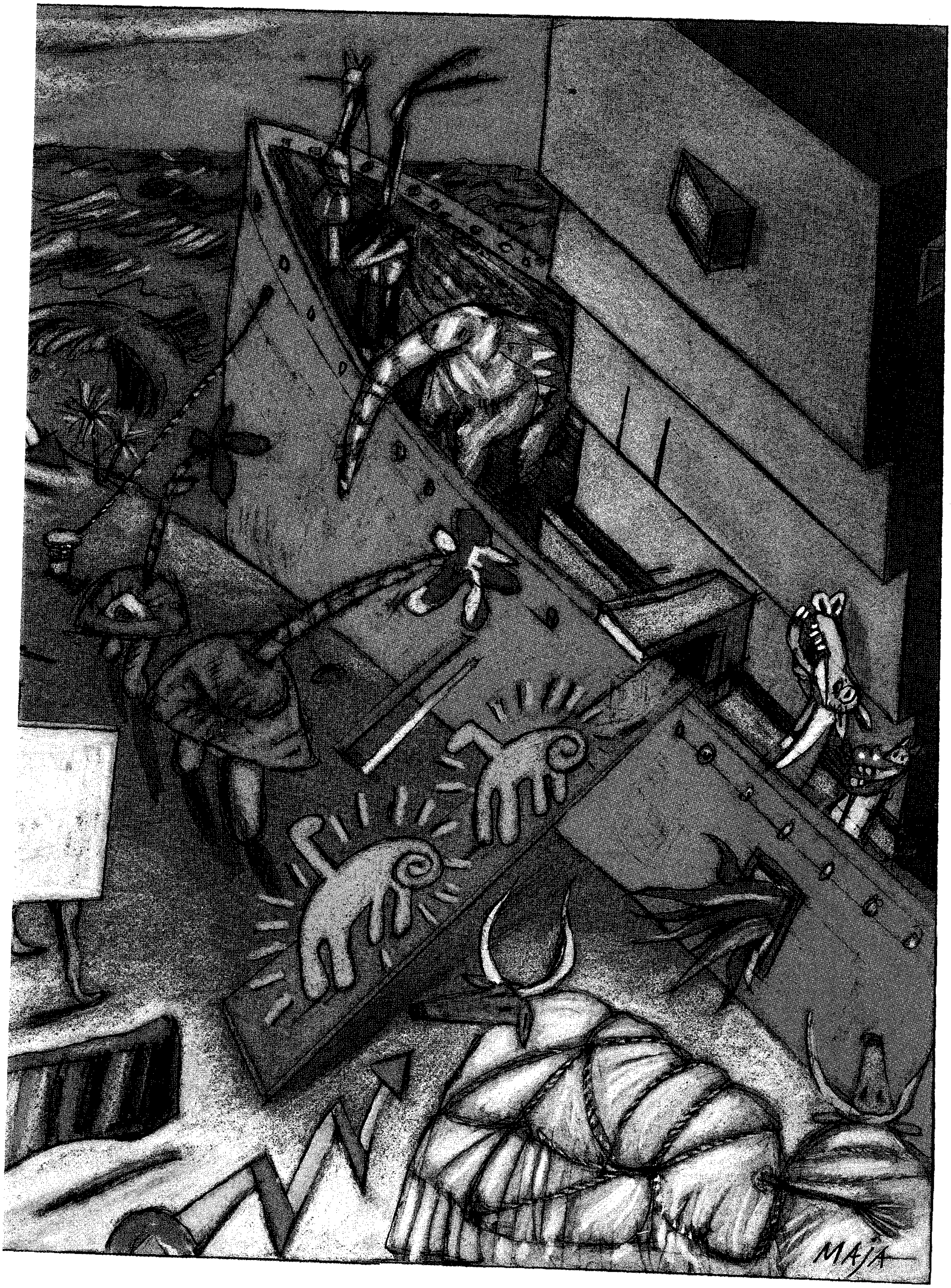
In Africa, where modern governments have been notoriously lax in delivering services to ordinary folk, there is something to be said for stateless-

THE WHITNEY BIENNIAL

As a flood of Philistinism seems about to break over the New York art world, and support from the N.E.A. dries up, the Whitney Biennial (opening next week) has taken on a sturdier and more waterproof look. After the market-driven Biennials of the eighties, and the P.C. eat-your-spinach Biennial of 1993, this year's round-up makes room for everyone. Klaus Kertess, the curator, has declared that his theme is "Metaphor," a category so inclusive that it can accommodate every kind of artistic animal. Two by two, they come aboard—the Neo-Expressionist and the installation artist; the traditional lyrical realist alongside the agitprop rabble-rouser; the gender-delving video artist; and even Cy Twombly—to find a safe place and wait for a rainbow.



DRAWING BY DANIEL MAJA


MAJA

ness. On balance, the masses living under some of the worst kleptocracies would probably be better off with nothing. Indeed, the withering away of the state is already far advanced in some countries, such as Zaire, where a minuscule élite in league with international capital has accumulated great wealth and essentially withdrawn from a completely exhausted and immiserated society, leaving almost no public sector behind. Somalia may be headed in that direction—toward total, permanent privatization, and an increasingly polarized class structure—if its leaders continue to fail to form a government. But the state and "civil society" are never really entirely distinguishable, and particularly not in modern-day Africa, where the rickety structures of the colonial period, including the nation-state itself, have been either swiftly adapted since independence to the purposes of other structures, most of which predate European colonization, or abandoned. The state's authority has been spotty, at best, everywhere on the continent. Even in stateless Somalia, there are today many overlapping zones of authority, some of them highly popular, which will challenge a government when, or if, one arises.

An obvious example is the Islamic *shariah* court system. Applying the civil and criminal law found in the Koran and in the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, *shariah* is filling the void left by the disappearance of a secular justice system. Most *shariah* advocates are careful to distinguish the courts from Islamic fundamentalism, which they say is an anti-Western political movement, given to terrorism, whereas *shariah* is simply a popular response to social disorder. This distinction was made repeatedly by the judge and the chief prosecutor in a *shariah* courtroom I visited in the Wardhiigley neighborhood, in north Mogadishu. Their court's purpose, they said, was practical: to fight crime. And, by all accounts, they have had great success. In north Mogadishu, which is controlled militarily by Ali Mahdi's forces, *shariah* courts have been functioning for only six months, and already the streets there are much safer than those in the southern half of the city: women can wear jewelry in public, and children can play in the streets, even after dark.

On the wall above the judge was a painted motto, in Arabic—translated for me as "Those Who Do Not Judge by What God Has Revealed Are Infidels"—along with a set of scales and a vividly rendered sword. I asked how suspects are identified. They are brought in by the public, I was told, or by special police hired by the court. They are tried according to the Islamic teachings, which have strict rules of evidence, requiring at least two eyewitnesses or a confession to convict. The conviction rate, I was told, is nonetheless high. That may be because no defense counsel is allowed or because, despite the severe punishments ordered by the Koran, many defendants simply plead guilty.

I asked about punishments.

The judge, a thin, severe man in a sand-colored embroidered cap, and the chief prosecutor, a big, bearded, bright-eyed fellow in a red kaffiyeh, and a host of onlookers who had gathered around began to tick them off. For eating in public during Ramadan: public flogging—thirty-five lashes. For robbery: a hand chopped off with a sword. For armed robbery: a hand and a foot. For murder: execution, with the body to be left outside for three days.

"Does a guilty plea temper sentencing?" I asked.

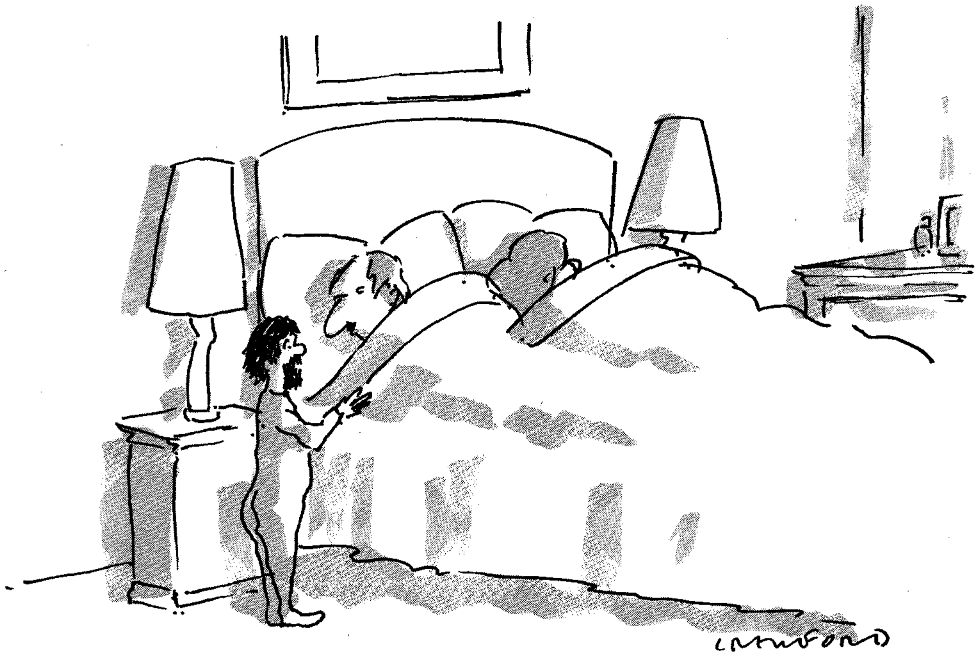
Not at all, I was assured. The family of a murder victim can, however, opt to receive traditional financial compensation from the killer rather than let him be executed.

I asked about sexual crimes.

Adultery: if both sinners are married, both are stoned to death; if one is unmarried, he or she is flogged—a hundred lashes—and the other stoned to death. For unmarried lovers: a hundred lashes. For public kissing: thirty lashes. For married men caught in a homosexual act: death by stoning. For unmarried men: a hundred lashes. For, in my translator's phrase, "making love to goat": a hundred lashes.

I got the feeling that the *shariah* crowd could have gone on listing sexual crimes and punishments all afternoon, but the judge cut them off. The biggest problem in Wardhiigley had been armed gangs, he said, robbing and raping, looting and killing. The *shariah* court had stopped them cold in six months.

Whether the *shariah* court's authority will ever be more than local is an open question. I imagine that in a showdown with one of the major clan militias any *shariah* judge would have to back down. And I suspect that the civic peace so harshly imposed on north Mogadishu will be overwhelmed if there is a resumption of the civil war. The *shariah* courts will have a place in whatever political equilibrium Somalis eventually find, but the major clans will have to work out their relative positions first. That is what they were doing



"Dad, when will I be old enough to shave?"

"TO MRS. MOORE AT INISHANNON"

No. 1, Fifth Avenue, New York City, Sept. 14th, 1895
—and Mother, dear, I'm glad to be alive
after six days on the crowded Oceanic—
tho' I got here all right without being sick.
We boarded in the rain, St. Colman's spire
shrinking ashore, a few lights glimm'ring there;
a big gull sat at the masthead all the way
from Roche's Point to Montock, till one day
it stagger'd up and vanish'd with the breeze
in the mass'd rigging by the Hudson quays . . .
Downtown, dear God, is like a glimpse of Hell
in a "hot wave": drunken men, the roaring El,
the noise and squalour indescribable.
(Manners are rough yet oddly delicate;
more immigrants than you cd. shake a stick at.)
However, the Kellys' guesthouse; church and tram;
now, thanks to Mrs. O'Brien, here I am
at last, install'd amid the kitchenware
in a fine house a short step from Washington Square.
Protestants, mind you, and a bit serious,
much like the Bandon sort, not *craic* like us,
the older children too big for their britches
tho' Sam, the 4-yr.-old, has me in stitches:
in any case, the whole country's underage.
I get each Sunday off and use the privilege
to explore Broadway, the new Brooklyn Bridge
or the Statue of Liberty, copper torch on top
which, wd. you believe it, actually lights up!
Eagles and bugles! Curious their simple faith
that stars and stripes are all of life and death—
as if Earth's centre lay in Central Park
when we both know it runs thro' Co. Cork.
Sometimes at night, in my imagination,
I hear you calling me across the ocean;
but the money's good, tho' I've had to buy new clothes
for the equatorial climate. I enclose
ten dollars, more to come (here, for God's sake,
they fling the stuff around like snuff at a wake).
'Bye now; and Mother, dear, you may be sure
I remain yr. loving daughter—Bridget Moore.

—DEREK MAHON

when the world intervened to stop the famine in 1992, and it is what they will resume doing now that the United Nations is gone.

ATO was right about the final U.N. withdrawal, and about the transfer of the port and the airport: there was little fighting. The United States troops overseeing the pullout exchanged some machine-gun fire with the *mooryaan;* the latter suffered all the casualties. The withdrawal was complete by March 3rd, and a combination of Habar Gidir and Abgaal militias quickly sealed off the port and the airport, chasing away freelance looters. The joint-management arrangement seemed to be working as had been planned, at least for the moment.

The rest of the world, meanwhile, seemed relieved to be seeing the last of Somalia. The most often quoted official remark of the week came from General John M. Shalikashvili, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who said, simply, "They're on their own now."

They are, indeed. Actually, they have been for some time. Virtually all the foreigners not hunkered down at the airport were pulled out of Somalia weeks, if not months, ago. Some of the international aid agencies still have projects going in the more peaceful parts of the country, such as the far north, and many of the ones that have left will be watching for a chance to return: Somalia, if security conditions only improve, promises to be an excellent future market for the relief-and-aid industry. In the meantime, except for a handful of journalists, there have been almost no non-Somalis anywhere in sight for many weeks. It has thus been possible lately to begin to see what it is that Somalis are on their own with.

Anogeel and I took a ride out the Afgooye Road a couple of weeks ago. Our destination was Lafoole College, his alma mater, ten miles west of the city. On the way out of town, he identified some of the larger ruins we passed. "This was the university faculty of economics and law," he said. "And this was a medical factory." I had taken a similar drive out through Mogadishu's main industrial district, during which my guide intoned, "This was the former fish cannery. This was the former Toyota distributor. This was the former aluminum factory." Somalia's former life as a semi-industrialized country stands around it in the shape of these hulking ghosts. The cost of rebuilding such infrastructure would be no greater, presumably, in real terms than the cost of rebuilding Germany or Japan was after the Second World War. But international capital may not be willing to come back here. There is a sense in which Somalia, along with a number of other African countries, has simply shrugged off the colonial interlude—relieved itself of the whole first tier of imported industrial development. Certainly, without a government in place international lending institutions such as the World Bank will never come back. And any central government that is formed, no matter how modest, will need an immediate infusion of funds from outside to keep running until it can collect taxes. In many ways, the Somali future is slightly unimaginable.

Still not quite out of the city, we turned in to the grounds of the former university faculty of politics and journalism for a quick tour. This, Anogeel said, was where he had wanted to study. He had written "Journalism" on his college application, but the minister of education, who happened to be Siad Barre's brother-in-law, had ordered that Anogeel study history instead. The faculty of politics and journalism turned out to be an empty shell on a hilltop. Stinging red sand blew through the concrete skeletons of classrooms and offices; goats and donkeys grazed in the sun.

Once we were back on the road, it occurred to me, not for the first time, that the single worst aspect of Somalia's breakdown has been its impact on education. Public schools and colleges deteriorated during the last years of the dictatorship, and then, more than four years ago, they closed altogether. A handful of primary schools are open today, most of them supported by foreign charities, a few by determined parents. But there are no public high schools, let alone colleges, and the vast majority of Somali children have received no secular education for years. Koranic schools have sprung up, and everywhere you see children carrying their *loox*—wooden boards on which a sacred verse is painted until it is memorized, then is sanded off and replaced by a new verse—but the focus in these schools is entirely on memorizing a religious text in Arabic. Neither literacy nor numeracy is part of the curriculum. What happens to a country without secondary schools and with no university? What happens to all the bright children who would have gone to college? No anti-statist with a heart can contemplate these questions without horror. And nothing that we might recognize as a university, say, is imaginable without a government.

Big trucks piled high with bananas and bristling with gunmen streamed past us in the opposite direction, heading for the port. Smaller trucks loaded with khat, even more heavily guarded, also sped past: they were coming in from an Ato-controlled airstrip known as K Fifty and were bound for Bakara Market. Some of them would head back to the airport carrying stacks of *Xog-Ogaal*. I asked Anogeel if he chewed khat.

"No, no, no, no, no," he said, and he made his most priggish face. "I don't believe in it. It is also bad for your health."

He indicated Abass, my translator, who, along with some of our guards, had been energetically chewing khat since lunchtime, and said, "Look at his teeth." But Abass refused to open his mouth. And so Anogeel, to my surprise, grabbed him by the jaw and tried to force his mouth open. No luck. Anogeel shrugged. He pointed at Abass's stomach, saying, "It is also bad for the stomach." Then he pointed at Abass's crotch. "And it makes the sperm go out," he said.

I was not sure what that meant—impotence? sterility? involuntary emissions?—and I did not ask. But Abass, perhaps noting my confusion, spoke up from behind his hand (shielding his teeth from Anogeel's view), saying, "He means that if you chew you cannot play sex." Abass dropped his hand and gave me a khat-filled grin. "But he is wrong."

We came to a roadblock. We had a second vehicle with us, giving us a total of five or six armed guards—or "drug-crazed gunmen," in the favored news phrase—which more than trumped the two pubescent boys with beat-up Kalashnikovs at the roadblock. They stepped aside. A small squatter camp trailed off behind them into the thorn scrub—probably supported, I thought, by the tolls the two boys managed to collect. I remembered Anogeel's calling the warlords the AIDS of Somalia, and I imagined that many people would say the same thing about the young thugs who were everywhere now—the *mooryaan*. But the metaphor might be crucially inexact, I thought, for the AIDS virus eventually self-limits by killing its human host. And the warlords and the militias are beginning to demonstrate adaptability, to show some mercy for their hosts: rather than steal all of a community's food, they might steal half.

"This is the hospital President Bush visited," Anogeel announced, pointing out a rambling structure south of the road. Remarkably, the facility seemed to be operating. "It is a private hospital for women."

I had forgotten that George Bush ever visited Somalia. But he did, over New Year's, 1993, a few weeks after sending in the troops. That visit was part of a "victory lap" through the scenes of Bush's foreign-policy successes. Was it really only two years ago?

I noticed another going enterprise: a water-pumping station, formidably guarded. This, I realized, was the source of a dozen or so water-distribution points I had seen along a main road in Mogadishu. There was not enough pressure in the pipeline to operate taps in buildings, but there was plenty of water, so entrepreneurs were selling it out of impromptu wells to lesser entrepreneurs with donkey carts and fifty-five-gallon drums. I asked Anogeel who owned the station.

"Some intellectuals," he said dismissively. In Somalia, "intellectuals" are not necessarily tweedy Kantians. They are just people with degrees. "And a soldier," he added. "Dhegaweyne is the soldier's name. That means"—he pointed at his ears—" 'big ears.' "

Anogeel, I knew, did not have the highest of all possible opinions of "intellectuals," who routinely appear, along with "elders" and "women," on the list of groups that critics believe the United Nations should have been dealing with politically, rather than with the warlords. I had heard Anogeel dismiss the list as simplistic and misleading. Like the elders, some intellectuals worked with the warlords, he said, advising them on matters like foreign funding. Not even women had been blameless: "They sell their jewelry to buy arms, encourage their defeated fighters by singing, and perform victory screams when there is a victory for their tribe."

We arrived at Lafoole College. A low-rise, modern-looking place, it had been the home of the college of education and the history faculty of the national university. Now it was a displaced-persons camp. The classrooms and dormitories were full of families; the walls were blackened by cooking fires. We pulled up to a row of small cinder-block houses standing apart in the scrub—faculty housing. A tall, middle-aged man wearing thick eyeglasses and a *ma'awis*, a traditional Somalian sarong, came out to greet us. He was Anogeel's old history professor, Hussein Haaji Yuusuf. We talked with him in the shade of his house.

The college had closed in December, 1990, two days before the final battle for Mogadishu began, Professor Hussein said. It had been closed ever since. "It has been crush-èd," he said quietly.

He had worked for the United Nations for three months, producing a report on "stray children." Otherwise, he had been unemployed since 1990. "I go in to Mogadishu to ask for food for my children," Professor Hussein said. "Sometimes I go to my former students. Anogeel once gave me fifty thousand shillings. The young people in Somalia like their teachers."

At something of a loss, I asked the professor if he had ever been overseas. He said that he had studied educational psychology at the University of London for three years.

He offered to show us around the college. Accompanied by a growing throng of ragged children, we walked through the campus. Anogeel, who swung his long arms strangely while he walked, pointed into a trashed gymnasium. "This is where we played basketball," he said. Inside the gym, a painting of Siad Barre was still visible on the wall.

We came to a large green building. It was the old main library, Professor Hussein said. A wary-looking elderly Muslim cleric came out, surrounded by the women of his family. This was Sheikh Hassan, the professor said. He was a well-respected man, and he and his family were living here, "defending the library." Yes, many of the college's books and papers had been saved. The Sheikh, who had a white beard, did not speak or look at me. Professor Hussein persuaded him to fetch his keys and let us into the library.

It was a world of dust. Books were piled everywhere, on sagging shelves, on toppling heaps. Some were stained and disintegrating, but most were intact. Every title I saw seemed, under the circumstances, absurdly ironic: "The Psychology of Adolescence," "Adolescents Grow in Groups," "Primitive Government," "The Red Badge of Courage." Sunlight drifted through high windows on the west wall. A cow mooed somewhere. The dust was so deep it was as though the desert itself were creeping through the walls, burying the books in fine sand. The Sheikh rattled his keys.

Back outside, surrounded again by children, I asked Professor Hussein if any of the camp's youngsters went to school. Only Koranic school, he said. He asked them to chant something in Arabic, and they did.

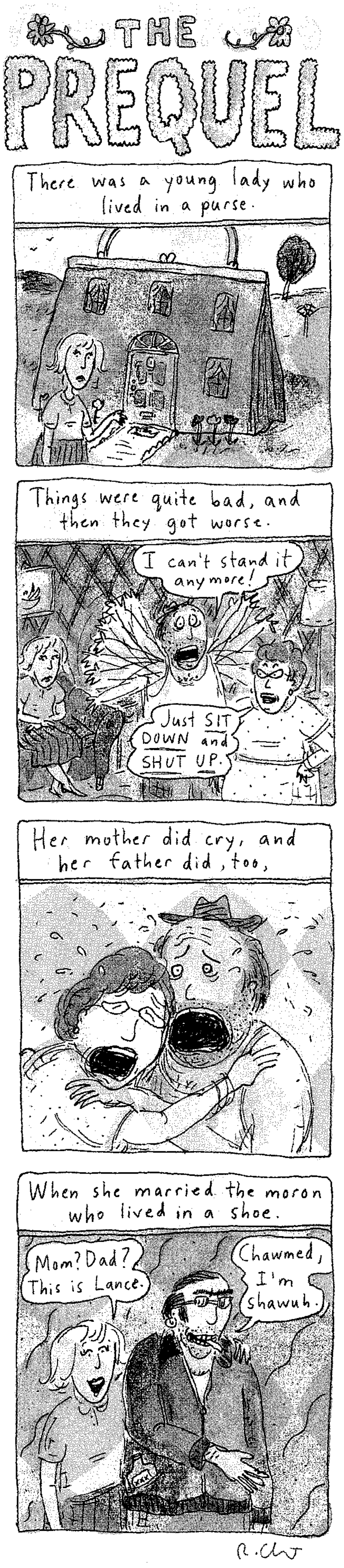
As we returned to our cars, a woman wearing a brilliant head scarf caught my eye. She had something in her arms, under a shawl. In the moment that I looked at her, she unveiled her bundle. It was a baby, very badly burned. I looked away sharply, and when I looked back the woman had covered the baby. She looked embarrassed, as if she had made a mistake. We left. I was breathless with shame for having looked away from the baby—who had appeared, at a glance, to be too badly burned to survive. I turned to Anogeel. I couldn't tell whether he had noticed the woman. He said simply, "She thought you were a doctor."

I immediately wanted to go back and offer her a lift—perhaps to the hospital we had passed. But I knew that the gesture would be pointless. She knew where the hospital was. And our guards were adamant that we should be back in Mogadishu before sundown.

We blew through a couple of roadblocks, then passed the water-pumping station owned by Big Ears and the intellectuals. Feeling very flat, I asked Anogeel if Professor Hussein might not involve himself in such an enterprise. I knew that Hussein was a different sort of intellectual from the Big Ears group, but his life of begging had struck me as excessively passive.

"No, no, no, no, no," Anogeel said. He made his prim, righteous face. "If he did that, he would become nothing. A professor must save his name."

Maybe Anogeel knows what he must save it for. ♦


THE PREQUEL
There was a young lady who lived in a purse.
Things were quite bad, and then they got worse.
I can't stand it anymore!
Just SIT DOWN and SHUT UP.
Her mother did cry, and her father did, too,
When she married the moron who lived in a shoe.
Mom? Dad? This is Lance.
Chawmed, I'm shawuh.

PROFILE

SON OF RUMPOLE

In America, John Mortimer is captive to the success of "Rumpole of the Bailey," but in England he is captive to the memory of his father, a man who inspires his best work—and whose life he still inhabits.

BY IAN PARKER

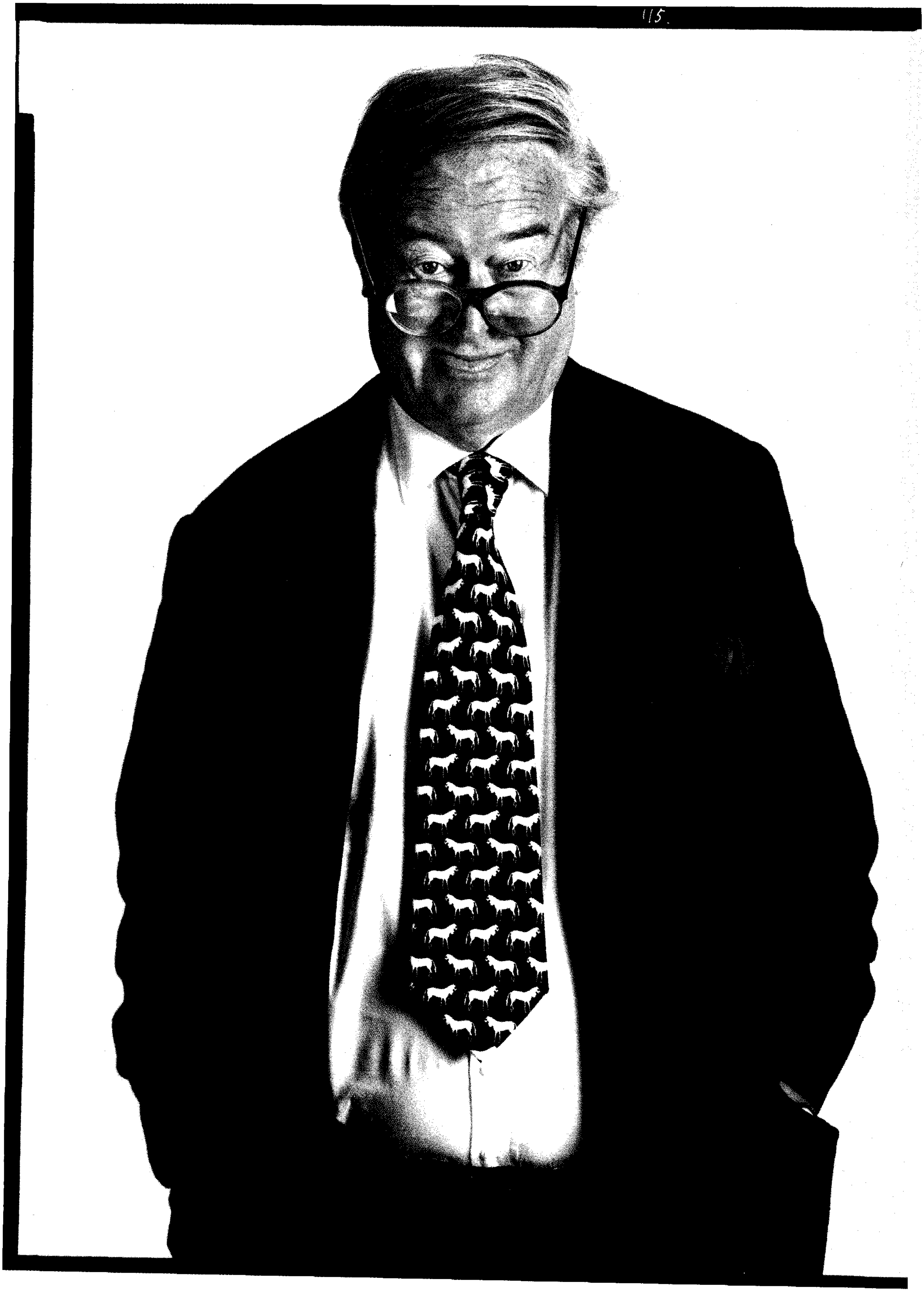
LONDON newspaper columns sometimes like to imagine John Mortimer, the writer and former practicing barrister, as the first President of a future British republic. Two opinions about him feed into this same jokey theme: one affectionate, the other less affectionate. Mortimer's critics note the vaguely Dickensian public ambitions of a rather middlebrow author. They remark on Mortimer's clubbability and girth—both are considerable—and have something to say about "champagne socialism." This comes from both the left and the right, for Mortimer is liable at one moment to be damning the present Conservative Government and at the next to be supporting foxhunting. Mortimer's admirers, meanwhile, have no argument with champagne socialism. They know Mortimer to be a famous charmer and boozer and Garrick Club wit, but they also find virtue in the breadth of his appeal. He is a conservative as well as a socialist; he knows his way around both theatres and jails; he has secured a large and loving audience for good writing. (On PBS, Mortimer's "Titmuss Regained" was "Masterpiece Theatre"; in its country of origin, it was better known as "television.") According to this school of thought, President Mortimer would unite his nation. After all, here is a man who is already so persuasive in the role of a chuckling national uncle that he receives a letter every few months from a woman he does not know saying, "How Nell and Dave looked daggers when they saw us laughing together in the corner at Heather's place!" or "Julie couldn't get over how tired and out of sorts you looked and suggested Pam had been giving you a hard time over that business of the car."

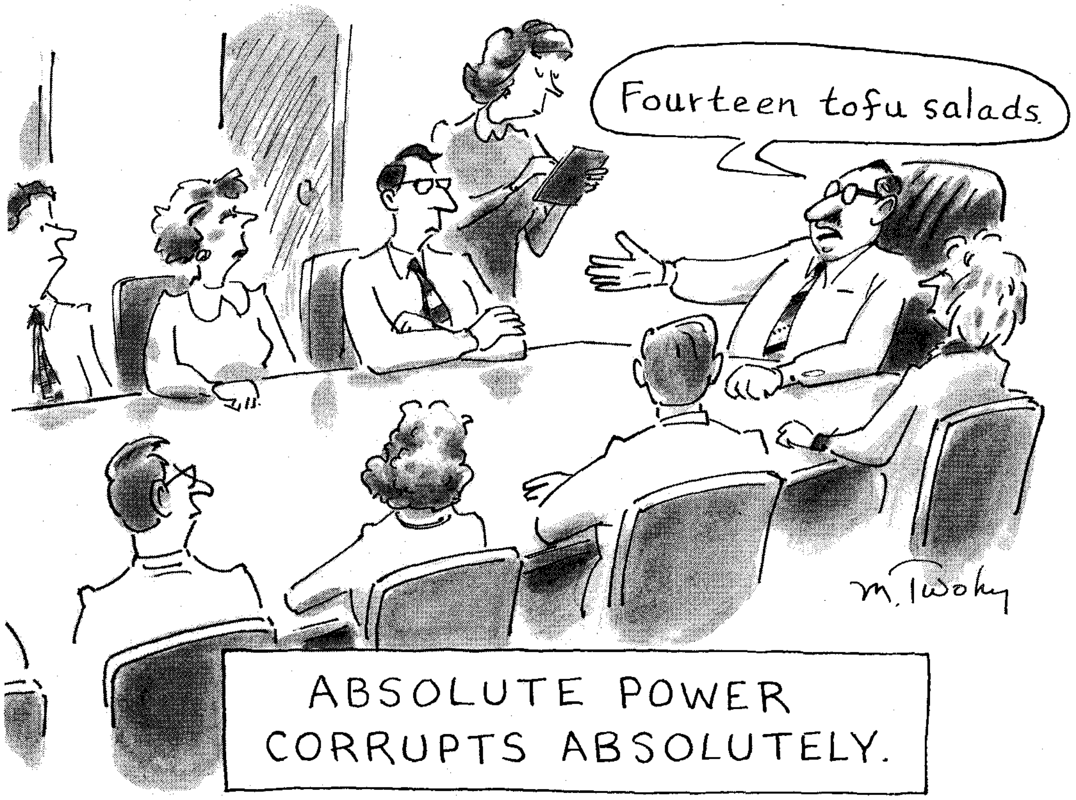
"I think the public really has an affection for him," says Neil Kinnock, the former leader of the British Labour Party and a close friend of Mortimer's. "He's Good Old John." Good Old John: This is the Mortimer who in 1971 was probably the best-equipped barrister in Britain to explain to an Old Bailey jury why Rupert Bear, the much loved children's comic-strip character, was represented in the underground magazine *Oz* as having an extraordinarily large erection. His closing speech in that trial—a gust of sympathy across the generation gap—is still moving after more than twenty years. Good Old John: From deep in the folds of the establishment, he tries to make things better; he campaigns for penal reform, takes his place on committees, promotes the Labour Party, gives talks, writes funny, humane prose. He is that peculiar and outdated thing, the English man of letters—a combination of Václav Havel and Toad of Toad Hall. He moves with old-fashioned, tweedy self-confidence between writing a piece of popular journalism and translating an opera. Neil Kinnock says, "He is one of the last remaining bridges between that classic clubby, cultured establishment and the rest of society"—just the sort of rubbishy old bridge, in fact, that Kinnock's old adversary Mrs. Thatcher did her best to tear down. Today, Mortimer may seem from another time, but he is still standing, and you hear in him a quiet echo of something now lost: a kind of prewar liberalism, a sense of middle-class obligation, and the voice of his life's great influence—his father, a cantankerous divorce barrister who drowned earwigs as a hobby.

"HAVE you a *motoring car*?" John Mortimer asked me when he invited me to meet him in the country. We had a merry lunch of champagne and socialism in a restaurant near Henley-on-Thames, in Oxfordshire. "The thing I don't think is right is that people who are well-off should be forced to be Conservatives," he said. Mortimer's voice is high, almost camp. He laughs at the beginning of most sentences. He has big, round spectacles, a round face, and hair that seems to have been brushed by two people with different ideas: he looks like Edward Lear's Owl, the one who sailed with the Pussycat. "Unless a few people who have some sort of influence are going to be left-wing, the left wing is going to be very impoverished. I don't think your personal life should be dictated by your political views; I don't think you should have to eat muesli and wear a bobble hat." Mortimer, in a suit, ate herring, and then offered to show me his home, which was near the restaurant. There was a delay in the parking lot, because he could not remember how to start his car. Then he picked up his car phone, and rang the man who usually drives him: "Hello? . . . Would you remind me . . ." Thus reminded, he drove slowly home, up narrow lanes, into the woods.

Mortimer shares a quite small and isolated white house, Turville Heath Cottage, with his second wife, Penny; their ten-year-old daughter, Rosie; and his father, Clifford. Clifford Mortimer died more than thirty years ago, in a terrible grump ("I'm always angry when I'm dying," he said), but he has not quite moved out. His things are still here: a beloved garden, an armchair, and also ways of thinking and talking and—what is important—*not* talking which his son has borrowed for his own use and has passed on to a crowd of characters in drama and

PHOTOGRAPH BY RICHARD AVEDON
John Mortimer, London, September 26, 1994.




Fourteen tofu salads.
ABSOLUTE POWER CORRUPTS ABSOLUTELY.

autobiography. The telltale signs of those borrowings: the law, reticence, a certain archaic decency, a tendency to recite poetry, and strong opinions. ("Never smoke opium, my boy," Mortimer's father told him. "Terribly constipating stuff—consider the wretched poet Coleridge. Green about the gills and a stranger to the lavatory.") Almost everywhere one looks in Mortimer's work, from his first novels, in the forties, to the most recent "Rumpole of the Bailey" scripts, Clifford Mortimer makes his presence felt. As a writer, John Mortimer is properly grateful to a man who used to say, "After you've been troubled by a wasp, don't you love a fly?"

Like someone born an aristocrat or born disabled, Mortimer lives as an adult where he played as a child. He has matched domestic with literary continuity: he writes about his father, and he sleeps in the bed where he saw his father die, and where he saw Laurence Olivier enact his father's death for a 1982 television version of his celebrated autobiographical play, "A Voyage Round My Father." And now his daughter runs in woods where Mortimer ran sixty years ago. "That is very nice," he said to me. "But also there's a feeling you haven't really gone anywhere." Later, Mortimer explained how his two dogs have their territorial limits (an expanse of fifty acres) defined by an invisible-fence system of a kind that is probably quite rare in the Home Counties: any Mortimer dog that passes over the underground cable receives a (mild) electric shock through its collar.

On a short tour of Turville Heath Cottage, we looked at drawings by Mortimer's mother, photographs of his father, and works by David Hockney, by Jacob Epstein, and by Mortimer's great friend the late John Piper. He has cartoons of himself on the wall of a little room he uses as an office. (When a famous person displays his newspaper cartoons rather than his newspaper photographs, you sense how modesty *so nearly* got the better of vanity.) We looked into the darkening garden. Sharing a life with your dead father must be tiring ("I don't know what he said or what I made up for him to say," Mortimer told me), but you can see the advantages: Mortimer has stuck a swimming pool right in his father's adored garden. Other people only dream of such satisfactions while on the psychiatrist's couch.

Then Mortimer took me back to a very hot kitchen, and the telephone rang. It was Penny Mortimer, who had just finished riding in a foxhunt. With mock prurience, Mortimer asked her, "Are you all muddy?" A little later, she burst into the kitchen, carrying cold air, high boots, a riding crop. This is a woman who, much to the delight of her husband, promotes field sports from within the Labour Party. She has the same name as Mortimer's first wife, the novelist Penelope Mortimer. Mortimer tends to refer to them as Penelope the First and Penelope the Second.

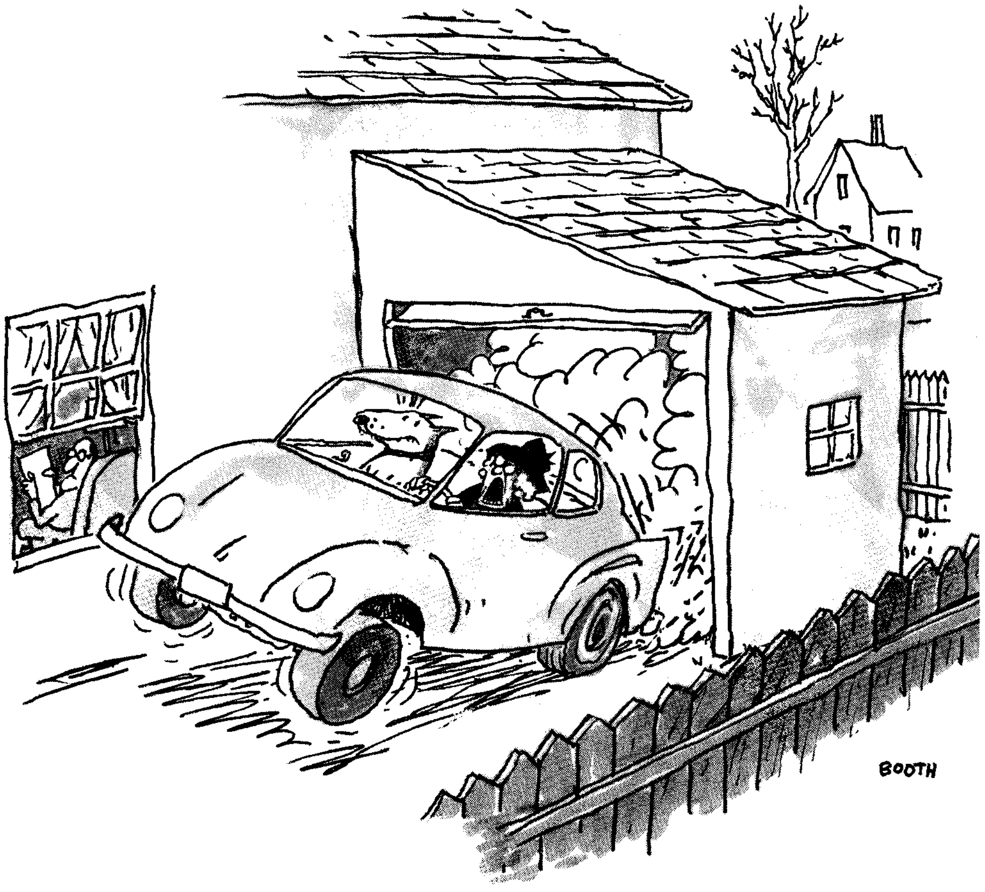
Mortimer, who is seventy-one years old, watched this house being built, when he was nine. He remembers "the wheelbarrows and the smell of new wood, and all that." The same year, he was sent as a boarder to the Dragon, a preparatory school in Oxford. His father was a leading light in divorce law; his mother, Kathleen, had been an artist, and something of a Shavian new woman, before her marriage. John was an only child. At school, he felt abandoned, and at home he was regarded as a slightly ridiculous adult. Both parents were well able to contain excitement about their son's achievements. (When, as an adult, Mortimer told his mother he had briefly acted as a judge, she laughed so hard she dropped the telephone.)

Those who have experienced Mortimer at his best—in his engaging lectures, or in "A Voyage Round My Father," or in the first volume of autobiography, "Clinging to the Wreckage," published in 1982—will know something they would never have heard said in this house: Clifford Mortimer went blind. In 1939, he hit his head while trying to get a ladder into a London taxi, and lost what was left of his failing sight. The Mortimer family never made any spoken reference to this fact, although John Mortimer's mother had to cut up the food on her husband's plate, had to squeeze the toothpaste onto his toothbrush. On the train up to court in London, she would read aloud to him from divorce papers. If she lowered her voice during passages about soiled bed linen, her husband, who besides being blind was rather deaf, would bark, “Speak up, Kath!” Clifford Mortimer’s faith in the sense of sight was not reduced by his loss of it. Things still had to be seen, on his behalf: the theatre, the garden, the pestilent earwigs he liked to trap and drown. And if he was angered by what turned out to be twenty years of sightlessness he chose to send his anger down secondary routes. To his wife, John Mortimer recalls, “he could really be awful”; to waiters he would shout, “Is there any danger of getting something to eat?”

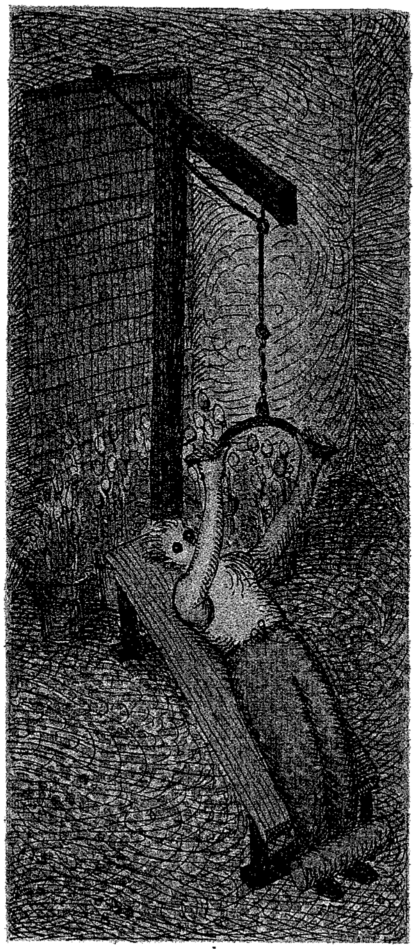
“We didn’t discuss what we felt,” Mortimer told me. “It’s very English, and that was part of the Englishness I wanted to convey when I wrote.” As a writer, Mortimer can see the virtue in leaving things unsaid. “It’s much more interesting to write about,” he said. “In ‘A Voyage Round My Father,’ if it had been an American father and an American boy, the boy would have said, ‘Dad, you don’t understand me, you never understood me.’ ” But Mortimer, who has almost no sight in his left eye (“My retina went—an awful repetition of history”), also positively approves of this reticence, of the way the family built a life style out of embarrassment. “I find it a very admirable way of coping, and rather heroic, really,” he said. Indeed, Mortimer’s many books are full of heroic truth-suppressors in conflict with unsavory truthtellers. There is a lot of not talking things through. In the novel “Dunster” (1992), for instance, the hero deliberately destroys evidence of another’s war crime. And Horace Rumpole, office politician above all, is forever piloting colleagues into the calm waters of obfuscation. Mortimer writes in the who-are-we-to-say? genre. Crimes and mysteries drive elegant, old-fashioned plots—until the last pages, that is, when it tends to be ruled that some mysteries are best left mysterious. Mortimer cites the influence of Ibsen’s “The Wild Duck,” and Gregers Werle’s destructive determination, in that play, to have others face facts. When Mortimer was discussing with me Harold Pinter’s conviction that British police horses are trained “to shit on demonstrators,” he suddenly realized, “Harold is Gregers Werle!” He adopted a Pinterish voice: “ ‘*Fucking duck!* Trained to shit!’ ”

Mortimer has inherited a good measure of his family’s reticence, and, for all the apparent disclosure in his autobiographical works and talks, there is much you do not know. In interviews he guides his answers toward handsome, polished anecdotes. Mortimer wants to be liked, not understood. He would rather not pass judgment on himself or on others. (He has sometimes had a problem keeping ideological antagonism alive: he was appalled to find himself charmed by both Oswald Mosley and John Major when he met them.) Mortimer’s personal and professional instincts have been toward defense. His new volume of memoirs, “Murderers and Other Friends,” is an exercise in great wit and good manners, in which his emotional life over the last twenty years is hidden somewhere beneath discussions of Rex Harrison, Laurence Olivier, and the legal right of the Sex Pistols to publish the word “bollocks.” “I don’t think it is an autobiography, I think it’s a book about the people who pass by, the passing shadows,” he said. He laughed. “I never wanted to write a book about my own emotions.” John Mortimer is in his anecdotage.

But there is an aspect of Mortimer that is not divulged by the beaming smile, the conspiratorially arched eyebrows. “He comes over as a genial, effervescent raconteur,” says Stephen Daldry, the artistic director of the Royal Court Theatre, of which Mortimer is an admired chairman. “But in fact, while he is all those things, he’s also a hard-nosed bastard.” (Daldry is smiling when he says this.) A few years ago, Mortimer, in another public capacity—president of the Howard League for Penal Reform—met the then Home Secretary, Kenneth Baker, to discuss suicides of minors in jail. According to Mortimer, Baker shook hands and smiled and asked Mortimer if he had seen any good operas lately. Mortimer replied sharply, “We haven’t come about operas but about boys hanging themselves.” The withholding of cuddliness is an effective, if rather specialized, weapon. Mortimer can do this for the sake of a political victory, and he can do it for his own sake. It is worth noting that his various celebrations of his father’s life have required him to sacrifice one of the very things he was celebrating. He abandoned reticence: he told *everyone* his father was blind. Mortimer’s mother was still alive in 1969, when “A Voyage Round My Father” was first seen, and she was



“Warp 1—engage!”



John O'Brien

against it. "I know my mother thought that it was dreadfully vulgar to write about your family, something absolutely outside the pale," he said.

Was there, I asked Mortimer, anything his mother could have said to stop him? He said, "No, I don't think so." A while later, he said, "I think all writers are ruthless. You have to be ruthless."

ONE afternoon, a few days after our lunch in the country, John Mortimer was driven to a grand town house in Belgravia, where he was due to address wealthy benefactors of the Royal Court Theatre. He was led into a living room full of porcelain and perfume.

Before giving his talk, Mortimer moved affably around from group to coutured group, and people were excited to be so close to him. He soon found himself talking about foxhunting. Because Mortimer and his wife publicly support hunting, they receive abuse and threats from animal-rights campaigners. By way of small talk, Mortimer told one group of two or three listeners that his wife had recently come home to an answering-machine message that started, "You fucking whore, we know where you live." Mortimer also noted, in a jolly kind of way, that they had previously been "sent shit through the post."

Because Mortimer has a special, licensed place in the British establishment, no one in the beautiful room took offense. There was only a short pause while the conversation considered its future. Then one woman—elegant, middle-aged—saw an opening. "What kind of shit?" she asked.

It was like being in court. One of the great charms of an English criminal trial—especially the kind of obscenity trial in which Mortimer specialized toward the end of his career as a practicing barrister—is the contrast between the high pomposity of wig and gown and the smut that must pass from mouth to mouth. Mortimer learned about puns from his father but learned the comedy of incongruity in court. This is to do with gate-crashing swearwords, and formal language attached to informal lives—"Mr. [pause] Ringo Starr." In his books Mortimer registers how people can be overambitious with language, as witnesses often are in court. And in his talks he often makes legal language fend for itself in the real world; he rarely neglects to say that he was "fed, raised, educated, clothed, housed, entirely on cruelty, adultery, and willful refusal to consummate."

Inevitably for a man with two or three jobs, Mortimer carried one to another. He took theatre into court, as judges sometimes observed, and he took the court into the world of letters—into theatre, films, television, and journalism. (When Mortimer took to writing newspaper profiles, in the nineteen-eighties—cross-examining celebrities about their fathers and their gods—he wore the ghost of a wig. Mortimer to Mick Jagger: "Do you believe in immortality?" Jagger: "What a question to throw me in the middle of the World Cup!" Mortimer: "But do you?") Today, there is a further career, in which all his other careers are merged into one: the public performance. Mortimer has for a long time spoken publicly—as in Belgravia—to assist causes or promote books; but there are now plans to return the publicity tour to its roots in the reading tours of Charles Dickens. Mortimer intends to fill small theatres with paying customers. "I met this wonderful impresario," Mortimer says, "who also promotes Torvill and Dean, and Metallica."

In Belgravia, smart folding chairs were put out, as if for an entertainment in an earlier century. Mortimer dealt with the shit question (warned by his postman, he had not opened the package), and then he took his glass of wine to the mantelpiece and hooked a flat-palmed hand into his jacket pocket, like Edward VIII. You thought he might sing. "I was fed, raised, educated, clothed, housed," he told his audience, "entirely on cruelty, adultery, and willful refusal to consummate."

WHEN Mortimer passed his bar exams and began to make his own way in cruelty and adultery, he could already consider himself a writer. He had contributed to his school magazine (at Harrow, where he went after the Dragon), and his poems had been published while he was at Oxford, where—obedient to his father—he studied law. When Mortimer graduated, in 1943, he was rejected by the Army, which considered him—you imagine cruelly Falstaffian standards—too thin. So he joined the Crown Film Unit, which made dramatized documentaries. ("What are we fighting for, Pete?" "Well, I suppose it's . . . it's this thing they call democracy.") He wore a uniform with the word "Scriptwriter" sewn onto the shoulder.

This was a happy time in Mortimer's life. The only child, the middle-class boy, had joined his first team. He was also writing, and he was meeting girls. Much later, in the sixties, between Penelopes, Mortimer had what he calls a "delayed adolescence": parties, weekends in Paris, a pad in Little Venice. He behaved "not at all well," he says. "But, to be honest with you, the real time of sexual promiscuity was the war, the real time of swinging was the forties, because everybody thought they were going to die tomorrow." It seems significant that almost all of Mortimer's male characters are sexually passive; they have to be coaxed into the slightest congress. You wonder if this is Mortimer's half-conscious defense—"She made me do it!"—against charges of womanizing that have been made against him. He says no, it has to do with comedy: men who are sexually well organized are not funny.

The war ended, and Mortimer lurched into a new stage of adulthood: he joined his father's profession and chambers; his first novel, "Charade," was published and praised; and he met a woman of nearly thirty named Penelope Dimont. She was separated from her husband, and was also a novelist. She later described how Mortimer made his move: "What about a quick fuck and then home?" They were married in 1949. She already had four daughters, and they had two children of their own; in his second marriage—to Penelope Gollop—Mortimer has had two more. "I have never been without a ten-year-old child," he says now. Early in the first marriage, a friend of Mortimer's came to visit the new family, and saw the grocery bills: "I know you had a lonely childhood, but haven't you *overreacted*?"

Mortimer worked furiously hard, as if to satisfy both his own ambitions and those of his father. "John has one quality in common with Margaret Thatcher," his friend Geoffrey Robertson, a prominent barrister, says. "He is utterly bored by sleeping." Mortimer was, and is, an early riser. Before going to chambers in the morning (where he gradually took over his father's practice), he would write for several hours. In the decade after he met Penelope, he published five novels. He was a respected new novelist, whose aim was to write, as he puts it, "two feet off the ground," just breaking the gravitational pull of naturalism. But in the mid-fifties Penelope Mortimer's success in fiction rather outstripped her husband's, and in 1958 he cleared a little literary space for himself, by publishing his first play, "The Dock Brief." It was a short two-hander involving a barrister and his client, and, for the first time, Mortimer moved his father close to center stage. This had the effect of changing Mortimer's life. He won the Italia Prize, and almost immediately found himself in demand as a screenwriter. He was taken up by the producer Anatole de Grunwald; there were meetings with Otto Preminger in Hawaii and with Sam Spiegel in the Mediterranean, and great friendships with David Niven and Tony Richardson. Mortimer's films include "The Innocents" (1961), "The Dock Brief" itself (1962, and called "Trial and Error" in the United States), "The Running Man" (1963), his translation of Feydeau's "A Flea in Her Ear" (1968), and "John and Mary" (1969). Mortimer is very proud of "John and Mary," which was directed by Peter Yates and starred Dustin Hoffman and Mia Farrow. Many of the films are too "dreadful" to talk about, or were never made; he prefers to remember his plays from the same period. But it was an appealing element of the British freelance barristerial system that it made no objections to a member's spending a while, now and then, in Malibu—although "they wondered where I was."

"The Dock Brief" seems to have marked the beginning of the end of Mortimer's marriage to Penelope the First. It is easy to find seeming evidence of disharmony in the contemporaneous fictional work of both partners; in John Mortimer's play "The Wrong Side of the Park" (1960), for instance, and Penelope Mortimer's best-selling novel "The Pumpkin Eater" (1962). To put it simply, Mortimer writes about a man whose wife does not understand him, and his wife writes about a bastard. Other evidence, perhaps more reliable, can be found in the two very different autobiographies that cover this period. In "Clinging to the Wreckage" John Mortimer was typically tactful. He contrasted his own optimism with Penelope's great "gloom," and he recorded a single act of infidelity. Penelope Mortimer's second volume of autobiography, "About Time Too" (1993), conceded the elusiveness of biographical truth but seemed keen to seek it nonetheless, even at the risk of causing herself and others pain. Creating something of a London literary scandal, she expanded on the bastard theme. She suggested that "The Dock Brief" and the subsequent wealth and attention it brought her husband (Terence Conran *himself* installed their new kitchen) marked a turn in his behavior. He lost patience with familial responsibility. He turned with cruel vigor to episodes of "Sprat"—that is, freedom and fun—even while his wife (like the narrator in "The Pumpkin Eater") was undergoing abortion and sterilization. Mortimer's inherited respect for truth-avoidance, it seemed, could easily be worked into a kind of Adulterer's Charter. (As Jake says in "The Pumpkin Eater," "I love you. So why worry?") When Penelope Mortimer gave an interview to the *Daily Mail* on the publication of "About Time Too," the piece was accompanied by a large photograph of her ex-husband, with the caption "JOHN: He wanted to sleep with nubile young women."

This book hurt Mortimer, who is famously vulnerable to criticism. (While Neil Kinnock was leader of the Opposition, and underwent fairly regular and crude assaults in the British press, Mortimer constantly expressed awe at the way Kinnock would "brush it off.") According to Kinnock, Mortimer "recoiled" from "About Time Too" and its accompanying publicity. He has not replied to it, save to produce "Murderers and Other Friends," which is about as far outside the tradition of biographical revelation as it is possible to get. He says now, "Well, it was pretty nas—" but stops in mid-word and adds, "My present wife didn't like it at all." To reply, he says, would be "absolutely fatal." He notes, "I think that for two writers to live together is a very difficult situation. Like two actors, there's always one up and one down."

The Mortimers split up in the mid-sixties, then were reunited, and split up again. He had his "delayed adolescence." On the very last day of the sixties, at a New Year's Eve party, Mortimer met Penelope Gollop, then twenty-three. They had their first child, Emily, in 1971. That was the year after Kathleen Mortimer's death, following which her son moved back into Turville Heath Cottage. On his forty-ninth birthday, in April of 1972, Mortimer married for the second time. One can date from this period a newly relaxed, self-mocking, and faintly elegiac voice in Mortimer's writing, and also an increased number of characters built on the foundations of Clifford Mortimer. There are fewer spiky dramas about wives and affairs.

Emily Mortimer is now twenty-three and is a successful actress. In a recent magazine interview she recalled that her behavior toward her father used to be "appalling": she would have him park around the corner from school, "so my friends wouldn't see how old he was." Because he loved reading Wodehouse and Conan Doyle aloud to her, she was fourteen before she read a book on her own. That book was "Great Expectations," and she found in it an overpowering echo of her own filial ingratitude. She then realized "how nice my father was."

IN 1971, the "Schoolkids" issue of the magazine *Oz*—and Rupert Bear's sexual excitement in particular—caused its editor, Richard Neville, and his colleagues Felix Dennis and Jim Anderson to be charged with conspiracy to corrupt public morals and with obscenity, a lesser charge. Geoffrey Robertson, a friend of Neville's, who was then studying postgraduate law at Oxford, agreed to coördinate the defense. But, with only five days until the start of the trial, the services of a barrister had not been secured; two had pulled out. So Robertson and Neville approached John Mortimer, the now celebrated playwright-screenwriter-barrister. (Thanks to legal reform, the bottom had fallen out of divorce, and Mortimer had joined the higher tier of barristers: he had become a Queen's Counsel, or Q.C., as his father never had. This freed him to move into murder, at which advocacy he excelled, and obscenity.)

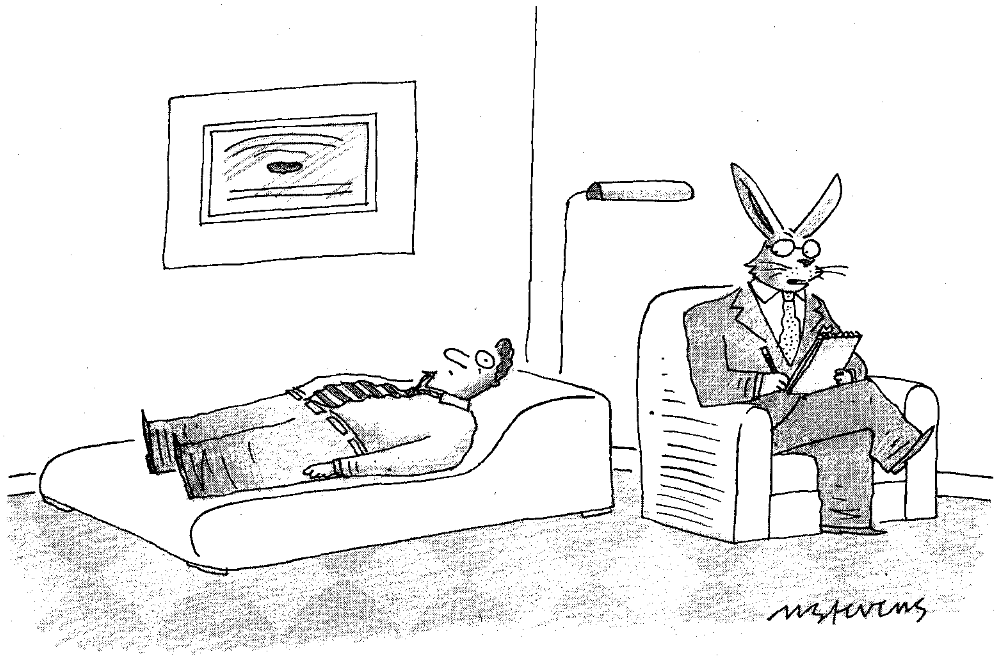
"We had been told he would be at this rather oversauced restaurant that used to exist opposite the Old Bailey," Robertson says. "We went downstairs and we found him surrounded by young women—subsequently, one of them became his wife. And we showed him Rupert Bear, who had deeply upset the British establishment. And he giggled, which was a reaction of immense relief to Richard Neville. John giggled, and said, 'Can I act for you?' "

The *Oz* trial opened in June of 1971, and was an event to delight the media: in the public gallery, joints were passed from hand to hand. Alec Guinness attended on one occasion, to research the role of Clifford Mortimer in the West End run of "A Voyage Round My Father." The judge had cunnilingus explained to him by a jazz singer, and was lectured on America's First Amendment by Oxford's Professor of Jurisprudence, Ronald Dworkin. The defense came within a whisker of calling Groucho Marx. There was high comedy and also something of the air of a philosophical debate, but much was at stake: the defendants risked twenty-year sentences, and the establishment risked absolute ridicule, and riots.

After five weeks, Mortimer summed up. In the play that Geoffrey Robertson wrote about the trial, he had to shorten his colleague's speech. So his version leaves out references to Sherlock Holmes and Lady Chatterley and much else, but it catches the tone: "Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, we heard a lot in the last speech about the Alternative Society. The truth of the matter is, this country contains many alternative societies and the great, the *most important* thing, is that we must learn to live with each other—and be tolerant of the alternative ideas we may have and not stifle each other's ideas and life styles. What is finally important in this case is the relationship between parents and children. In that relationship the important thing is tolerance, and understanding; the importance is for us all to be able to say what we feel. If, in putting forth their feelings, however mistakenly, however clumsily, children find that our reaction is to trundle out the law, to attack and suppress, and censor, there is a danger that they will shrug their shoulders, and smile, and turn away from us. And then we shall be a lonely generation, because we shall have lost them forever."

The defendants were found not guilty of conspiracy, and convictions for obscenity were overturned on appeal. "John saved the day for society, in a way," Robertson says.

Over the next thirteen years, he continued to defend—usually with Geoffrey Robertson at his side—murder, libel, or the "blasphemous libel" committed by the magazine *Gay News*. "His real genius," Robertson says, "was in cross-examining expert witnesses, where he would charm them into agreeing with him. He would always insure that a search had been done of their more recondite works, and he would make some reference early in the cross-examination to some obscure article that no one had ever taken any notice of. They'd be so thrilled that the brilliant Mr. Mortimer had agreed with some point they'd made once, which was irrelevant to the case, that in return they would agree



"You are a very sick rabbit."

with his proposition, although they were being called for the prosecution."

Mortimer could go back to the law at any time. His gown still hangs in the lavatory of the Inner Temple; it moves onward, one hook, at the death of a more senior barrister. But Mortimer says he will not go back. He valued court as a good place for a writer to be: a place of plots, of people not middle-class, of people seen under extraordinary stress. But Geoffrey Robertson says, "I don't think it would be said John ever *enjoyed* the law. He had it handed down to him rather as a duty, he took it up out of obedience to his father, and although he did these cases in some respects brilliantly, I think he really worried, and frequently he was physically ill. He was always gloomy and on tenterhooks in the robing room."

Mortimer's successor in law was a character whom Geoffrey Robertson calls "the first and perhaps only truly Dickensian creation that has appeared on British television." The near-spherical and undersexed barrister Horace Rumpole first appeared in a television film, in 1975. Three years later, he returned, with his own series and formula: an office plot, a domestic plot, and a criminal plot, all sounding variations on a single theme—mistaken identity, say, or the right to silence. It is easy to take delight in that mechanism, and in its Sherlock Holmes length and breadth, and in a character solid enough to inspire a self-consciously eccentric Rumpole Society in San Mateo, California, from whom members may buy "She Who Must Be Obeyed" nightshirts (twenty dollars). Mortimer became a famous man, mistaken around the world for the actor who spoke his father's lines.

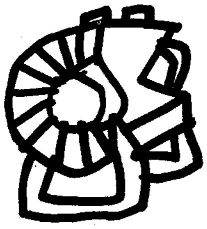
"Lord, if my prayers are pleasing to Thee, please confirm by fax."

In the nineteen-eighties, political disappointment caught up with John Mortimer. In the eighties, Britain was run by people who had not felt what Mortimer had felt during the Second World War or at the Labour electoral victory of 1945. The dampening of optimism "took a long time to come," Mortimer says. "The Conservative governments didn't destroy the welfare state—there weren't great fundamental changes until Mrs. Thatcher came, and the whole thing was then torn apart. Macmillan and the others had been part of a war against Fascism, and had an understanding of the people—the soldiers, the privates. It doesn't mean you have to have a war to produce better leaders, but I don't think anyone who lived through that period in which everybody in England was absolutely united for one aim could put up with a society in which everyone is totally divided against everyone else."

In 1981, Mortimer's disappointment somehow flowed into Evelyn Waugh's in 1944, and the result was a television screenplay for "Brideshead Revisited," one of the best-loved pieces of British television. The next year, Laurence Olivier starred in the second television version of "A Voyage Round My Father," which can be similarly described. "Clinging to the Wreckage" was published in 1982, and has sold more than three hundred thousand paperback copies in Britain. It seemed that the closer Mortimer moved toward the uncluttered life he had lost and almost regained—his father, the house, the garden—the more he charmed his audience. (All other explanations aside, writing explicit autobiography—like writing adaptations—freed Mortimer from those sturdy old plots he had seemed both to want and not to want.) But Mortimer then did something less seductive with this stock of recollection and lament. In 1985, he wrote a novel—his first in thirty years—and a parallel television script called "Paradise Postponed." This swept from 1948 to the present, from optimism to pessimism, and was full of love for lost professional ideals and endangered English landscapes. There seemed to be some great ambition—to show the country to itself, to muster some brief shared mood of unity. There are funny and good things in "Paradise Postponed"—including a kind of diptych self-portrait in the form of the Simcox brothers (hopeless rural man of integrity, international sleazeball screenwriter), but it was hard to see around the bulk of the Grand Design; much seemed stereotyped. Mortimer held a mirror, of sorts, up to the nation, and the nation shifted in its seat, and wondered what had happened to the wigs and the earwigs. There was a sequel, "Titmuss Regained," a few years later.

If these two books were Mortimer's grandest response to the Thatcherism he despised, he also made more modest gestures. On June 20, 1988, John Mortimer and his wife joined Harold Pinter and his wife, Antonia Fraser, and about twenty other writers and journalists in a West London living room to talk about left-wing politics. Carol Howard, whose husband, the journalist Anthony Howard, was to give a paper, remembers a "fork supper"; then chairs were set in a large circle, and "Harold was *very* boring about Nicaragua." Mortimer said little. There were other meetings, other papers, and those present became known as the 20th of June Group. It is an education in the history of Thatcherism to remember the huge ridicule with which the news of these small meetings was greeted in the British press. Around this time, Britain started to call its intellectuals "the chattering classes."

Today, Mortimer is no less hostile to the Conservative Government, but he feels a little out of step with the apparent caution and compromise of Tony Blair's new-look Labour Party. "I just hope it's not going to be a Clinton situation," he says. "Vote for some progressive person who'll turn out to be a terrible disappointment. I hope Blair wins. He'd better win. But it won't be the Labour Party I knew and loved, really."



"It is an extraordinary way to live," says Mortimer's friend the broadcaster and novelist Melvyn Bragg. "He inherited his father's job, his father's chambers, his father's house, his father's garden, his father's literary instincts, his father's taste. He inherited his father's life."

"I start work at about six in the morning, and then I get drunk at lunchtime and go to sleep," Mortimer has said. Each morning, he sits in his office in Turville Heath Cottage and writes, in longhand. His wife will type up what he has written: a thousand quick words on something new that is bad; or a book review; or a flamboyant defense of fox-hunting. (When a bill against hunting came before Parliament in 1992, Mortimer wrote, "Our stinking and broken-down prisons are already crammed to bursting. Must they now make room for the Master of Foxhounds and the children from the Pony Club too?") He recently adapted "A Christmas Carol" for the Royal Shakespeare Company. He has just written a film treatment of "Die Fledermaus," set in New York. He has started on a novel, "Felix in the Underworld," in which an author on a publicity tour is marooned in Britain's homeless underclass. Mortimer recycles: women are likely to be called Angela, hotels to be called the Stag at Bay. Several times, he has written a scene in which a blindfolded man has to guess whose mouth is kissing him. His ambition is to keep going, keep busy, like his father, who when he was being entertained would say with pleasure, "The time's nipping along nicely."

In the evenings, Mortimer gives talks about his father, has friends over, or goes to parties, where he drinks champagne and beams and blinks and flirts ferociously. ("He makes you feel, as a female, that you are the sex goddess of the universe," says the novelist Kathy Lette, who is married to Geoffrey Robertson. "That's because he really listens to you, and most men don't listen to women. He and I have been planning an affair for years.") And the stock of good will toward him continues to rise: he is a C.B.E. and has any number of honorary degrees, and there is a portrait of him in the National Portrait Gallery. In January, the *Daily Telegraph* called Mortimer a "national institution" and—intending no *Oz* resonances—"a nice old teddy-bear." The paper wrote, "There may be arguments as to Mortimer's status as an artist, but nobody can deny that he is a great entertainer."

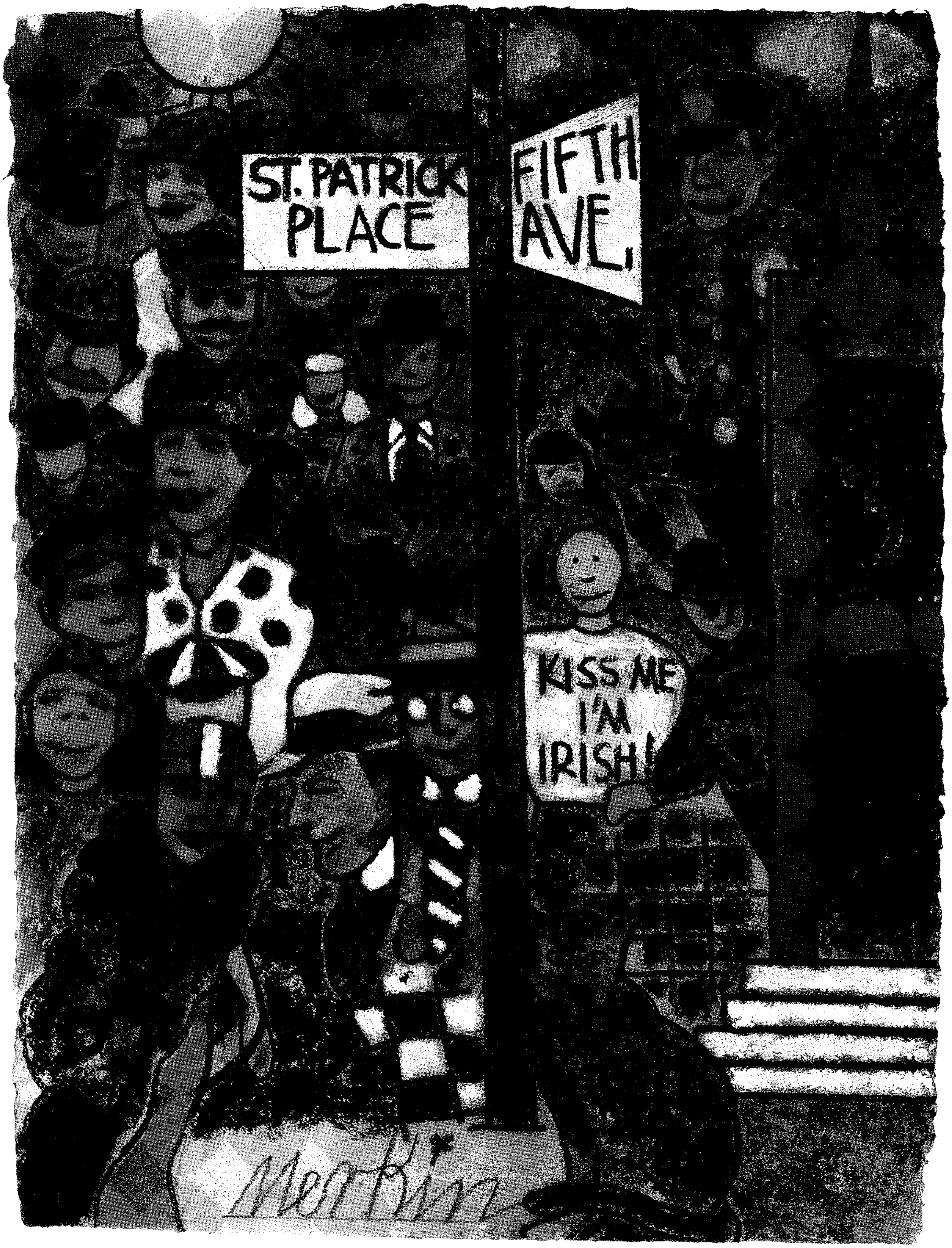
"I WAS fed, raised, educated, clothed, housed, entirely on . . ." Mortimer's voice is almost lost in a long, high-ceilinged hall. On a bright Sunday morning, four hundred sixth-form pupils of Eton College are sitting in uniform: tails, white bow ties, stiff collars, Hugh Grant hair. An enlightened policy rules that this event is an acceptable alternative to worship; the boys nevertheless stand up as Mortimer takes the stage, which pleases him. He is introduced as doubly daring: John Mortimer, the atheist *old Harrovian.*

He talks about how he, an unbeliever, is nonetheless indebted to the Christian tradition. Of course, the lecture is also about his father and the law: "Speak up, Kath!"; "stranger to the lavatory." The Etonians laugh a lot, their watches beep in the silences, and Mortimer finishes to great applause. Smiling, wide-eyed, large-bellied, he moves off the stage and out of the hall. He walks unsteadily. (He says he doesn't "like" walking, which is what his father might have said about seeing.) A well-brought-up sixth former, sixteen or seventeen years old, offers his arm, which is politely refused. But the two start talking, and they quickly bond through gossip about the Home Secretary, whose son this boy knows, and through shared disgust at his new Criminal Justice Act (sending twelve-year-olds to prison, and so on). They discuss a recent demonstration held against it in London. "People were leaning out of their gentlemen's clubs and shouting us encouragement," the boy says.

The scene: A seventy-one-year-old man in a three-piece suit and a boy, in tails, too young to vote. They squint in winter sunshine at Eton College, praising protest. And after a while the seventy-one-year-old man, the lost descendant of Charles Dickens—or the lost descendant of Samuel Pickwick, depending on your taste—crosses the road, to find his Mercedes and his driver and his way to Turville Heath.

IN the evenings, Kathleen Mortimer used to lead her ill-tempered blind husband through the garden, seeing the flowers on his behalf. Once, Penelope Mortimer (the First) heard a shout—"Kath! Kath!"—and she saw that Kathleen Mortimer had detached herself from her husband and had walked off to the edge of the lawn, where the garden falls away into the valley. Kathleen stood still and crossed her arms. Her husband was completely lost. He bellowed and waved his stick in the air: "Kath!" Then Kathleen came slowly back, and they continued their walk. In "Clinging to the Wreckage" John Mortimer wrote about how he, too, wanted "to shake him off, to run away," but never quite did. ♦

SKETCHBOOK · BY RICHARD MERKIN


ST. PATRICK PLACE
FIFTH AVE.
KISS ME I'M IRISH!
Merkin

FICTION

THE NICE RESTAURANT

BY MARY GAITSKILL

FILIP PAGOWSKI

“IT'S so cool about you,” said Evan. “You're thirty-four years old and you're a pedophile's dream. Even with your big juicy ass.”

“Maybe,” said Laurel. “But you're the tender young thing here.”

“I am *not* the tender young thing! You are! You are!” In delighted outrage, Evan squirmed and bucked in his chair.

Laurel smiled and stretched. Evan was, in fact, nine years younger than she.

They were seated at a table in the outdoor section of an expensive restaurant on the outskirts of L.A., surrounded by sibilant foliage and flowers. White umbrellas mounted on the glass-topped tables held the light in wide cups of flat perfection, under which the diners preened and basked. Faces were matte and cool in the beautifying flatness. Daylight waned intensely, delineating everything with maddening exactitude. Evan leaned across the table toward Laurel, and the tip of his long nose seemed about to whip from side to side with ardor. A waiter set down a glass of water; in its gently stirring reflection a tiny, fluid image of Evan trembled against the curve of the glass. Laurel felt wiggly with beauty, nearly sick with it. She felt as if every pretty detail contrived by the restaurant people was a manifestation of her and Evan's personal delight. Which was, of course, exactly how you were supposed to feel.

“Your face was wildly expressive just now,” Evan said.

“I was feeling seduced and repelled at once.”

“Oh?” Evan sat up expectantly.

“By the restaurant, you goose. I was getting drawn in by the whole nice-restaurant thing—the little flowers on the table, the smiling waiters, the whole ambience of ‘Aren't we special people to be here in this wonderful restaurant where everything is nice.’ Then I got disgusted by it.”

“Don't be disgusted. It's us that's making it nice, not the restaurant.”

“Yeah, but you know what I mean. There's something just so frail and embarrassing about the whole ‘date’ thing anyway, and then on top of that there's the God-damned restaurant where everything is perfect.”

“I'm out with Mrs. Hell. Come on, soon we'll be back in our lives, and once again there'll be grit and grime and little hairs sprouting on things. Can't we just have this moment of softness and flowers?”

JUST two years before, after conducting an exhaustive series of almost comically wretched sex affairs, Laurel had grimly embarked on a course of celibacy, sincerely, albeit drunkenly, declaring that she would never Do It again. (“It's a modern idea that you're supposed to have sex. Women used to be old maids. They *never* had sex, and it didn't kill them.”) She had let Evan get near her because he was so young, because he had a girlfriend, and because he flattered her.

Evan wrote for a fancy trend journal, and Laurel ran a sputtering graphics-design business. They had met through a mutual acquaintance. He had gambolled harmlessly about her for two years, calling her for light conversation and occasionally inviting her to some garish magazine-related event. Slowly, they progressed from the infrequent coffee date to dinner at her apartment. Although Evan had long since lost the girlfriend, Laurel thought nothing of it when, after the second dinner, he earnestly remarked that he had always wanted to cuddle her. Familiarity, drunkenness, and a desire to be touched made her forget that, although he was her young admirer, Evan was also a large, energetic adult male, and soon they were tussling on the couch as she remarked, “Evan, this *isn't* cuddling.” His aggression was first amusing, then annoying, then frightening, with eroticism flashing between the annoyance and fright. Pressing forward, he stuck his knee between her legs and opened her thighs; the maneuver was so blunt, so fresh in its young carnality that she was disarmed. Disarmament could have become pleasure, but she barked at Evan to sit up, and after a lot of groping and struggling, they did.

“Look,” she said. “I took you seriously when you said you wanted to cuddle. You're obviously really attractive, and I like you a lot, but I don't want to fuck you. I'm too screwed up to have sex, and I don't want to ruin the friendship.”

“I always knew you were pretty screwed up,” he said.

“Yeah, well,” she muttered. “So are a lot of people.”

“The same membrane that stretched once will always stretch again.”

“How seductive.”

“I was speaking metaphorically.” His voice was playful, but aggression glittered in his eyes. She considered Evan as a potential assailant and sobered quickly. He moved forward. She placed her fist firmly against his Adam's apple.

“Evan,” she said. “I don't want this to get ugly, do you?”

His eyes changed. He sat back. He left minutes later, rather morosely squeezing her ass on the way out.

She went to bed relieved but woke the next day obsessed with the memory of that carnal leg. She invited him to dinner the next week. Vigorously, they dispensed with her celibacy on the bed, on the couch, on the floor. A month later they sat in the nice restaurant, feeling full of themselves.

“I didn't start out wanting to make fun of them,” Evan was saying. “Because it's too easy and because everybody else already has. But how can I not, after that bogus ritual with Loki the love god?”

Evan was working on an article about the men's movement; he had just participated in a three-day workshop on male sexuality, and his open-mindedness had been severely taxed.

“Well, you know, sometimes people express the most important things in silly ways,” Laurel said.

“I was prepared for silliness. I was even prepared for rituals. But I wasn't prepared for the shallowness. I mean, they were having us do these chants and they didn't even know what they meant or where they came from. And that love-god thing! Where we were supposed to go and offer a gift to this shoddily constructed statue? I don't even think that qualifies as a ritual."

Laurel half-listened, delighting in the movement of his long, graceful hands, his buoyant voice, the changeability of his sensitive gray irises. Whenever he came to visit her and knocked on her door, she'd see his face in the half-moon-shaped window at the top of the door, and then, as she came closer, he would move off to the side, out of her range of vision. So that when she opened the door, she was slightly startled to see him standing there, huge and healthy and bristling with joy at the sight of her.

"Evan," she said abruptly. "How come, when you knock on my door, you always step off to the side so I can't see you in the window?"

Evan stuck out his chest and wiggled like a puppy massaging itself on a nubbly rug. "I love it that you notice that!" he yelled. He lunged across the table, his forehead crazily raised, lips pulled in as if to keep ridiculous sounds from bursting out. "Nobody else would. I do it because I have the kind of conflicted feelings you had about the restaurant—I see you coming to answer, and it's too much, this rising moment of anticipation and wonderfulness. We're looking at each other through the window, and it's all so open and sweet—it reaches a certain pitch and then I start to feel like a geek. So I step off to the side. Which not only relieves the geek thing, but it creates a kind of double-tiered effect to the greeting."

Laurel leaned forward and brushed her lips against his, enjoying the light, fleshy dryness. An agreeable landscape of need and satiety, arranged in endless, alternating layers, expanded before her.

"Of course, there's also the element of bewilderment on your face. For just a split second when you come out the door? You look confused because I'm not directly in front of you, and you have to look for me for a second. It makes you look really vulnerable. It's delicious."

Gently, Laurel bit Evan's lower lip and then withdrew into her chair. She said, "It's slightly monstrous, what you just said, but I love the subtlety of it. I've never been involved with a guy who could express anything quite that way."

"Honey, no offense, but I think you've known some idiots."

One of their shared myths, fully developed within weeks, was that Evan had rescued Laurel from her series of terrible boyfriends. Although the idea had been propelled into full-blown myth by its undeniable basis in reality, Laurel had noted that they both nurtured the vivid status of the myth a little too fondly. While Evan seemed genuinely pained at her stories, it was also clear to her that he enjoyed hearing them. Just that afternoon, they had rehashed the story of Vaughan: She had been sitting in Vaughan's car with him when, in response to a question she had asked, he took her face in his hand and turned it toward him, answering her with the imperial limpidity of his gaze. He let go of her face and said, "It's as simple as this. If a woman lets me do that, I not only know she'll sleep with me; it sets the emotional tone for the whole thing."

"That's so disgusting!" Evan had howled. "I can just picture him, the smug, shallow, handsome fool! How could you let him perform that stupid gesture on you?"

"I *enjoyed* the corniness of it. It was like I was a fourteen-year-old on a date with Davy Jones, and we were both wearing lacy blouses and pink lipstick. It was a very appealing role to play. And then he took it further by pointing out the phonyness. Sort of like creating a sense of camaraderie."

"Camaraderie! Camaraderie! It's the height of arrogance to do something like that and then point it out." He paused. "Did you suck his cock?"

"What do you think? Evan, you're getting hysterical."

"I know. I can't help it. It's sort of a masochistic thrill. So what happened with old Vaughan?"

The story of Vaughan became sillier and ultimately more painful, yet for some reason it was the hand-face gesture that Evan held on to, wringing it for shameful nuance. "The subtler things are always the grossest," he said.

A WAITER with a chest like a busy pigeon brought them hot breads and herbed oil and glasses of wine. He solicited their order; they needed a minute.

IF the old boyfriends often stalked the stage as villains, they sometimes donned clown outfits and threw pies. Chief among the clowns was Geoffrey, a diminutive sadist whom Laurel had described as "Elmer Fudd as high-school principal." Evan loved picturing the real Geoffrey's outrage at such a characterization. Surrounded by gagged and bound adolescent slave girls, he furiously paced Evan's imagination, ranting at an invisible audience: "Elmer Fudd! Elmer Fudd! Just ask *them* if *they* think it's about Elmer Fudd! Here, just take that gag out of her mouth! She'll tell you!" And for days all Laurel had to do was say, "Just take that gag out of her mouth!" and Evan would crack up.

Evan had old girlfriends, of course, but in comparison with the old boyfriends, enlivened as they were by Evan's dramatic projections, the pouting girls simply slouched against the walls. Evan gallantly presented them as mere pale prototypes for Laurel, but every now and then one of their little nymph faces would veer from the shadows into sultry relief, exposing fraught contours of cheekbone and eyelash, hinting the subtle heat of breath, the quick gleam of vital eyes.

"The last time I felt this way about anybody was with that girl Chloe," Evan had once remarked as they lay together. "It was the kinkiest relationship I'd had—until now, of course—even though we didn't do anything dramatic. It was all really understated and undiscussed, and that's what made it stronger. I would just fuck her really hard and say stuff to her that she thought was dirty. And I would feel her having this conflicted reaction of repulsion and excitement, even stronger repulsion and more desperate excitement, both of them held down really tight and boiling up against the lid. It was incredibly violative, even though it was just normal sex."

THE waiter came back. They ordered salads and oysters, pork chops and bluefish, and more wine. Dusk seeped in and bled off the perfect delineation that had been so present moments earlier. Laurel was suddenly aware of two things: one, that she was in love with Evan, and, two, that their affair would be, by her choice, a short one. The emotional intensity and cerebral distance attached to these thoughts rubbed together strangely.

"But then there was the special workshop in which we were supposed to discuss our sexual fantasies," Evan was saying.

Laurel's prurience reared its head. "Were they, um, candid?" she asked.

"They were unbelievably insipid. It was stuff like doing it in a rowboat on a moonlit lake, or somebody's wife giving him a blow job in a field of daisies."

"They were probably just describing the bare outlines. They probably didn't want to get into the nasty parts."

"I think they were just wimps."

"How did they react to your fantasies?"

"Well, I didn't really talk about my fantasies."

"Evan! You jerk! Why not?"

"Are you kidding? In the midst of all that sweet romantic stuff I'm going to talk about my— It would've been a slap in the face of everyone there."

"If they were wimps, you were, too."

"I was not a wimp," Evan said with dignity. "I was sparing the feelings of middle-aged guys."

"Oh, please. You were embarrassed, like they were."

"My fantasies aren't any of their business. I was there to research an article, not to bond."

Laurel shrugged, conceding.

"There was an interesting moment, though. One of the guys—he brought up a fantasy about sex with black women. He didn't elaborate, but just that little bit alone—I could feel discomfort move through the room."

"I'm surprised that interracial stuff would still have that kind of charge."

"If he was thinking about a particular black woman, it wouldn't have. But for it to be about black women generally was what made it uncool. I mean, that fairly reeked." He paused. "I should've told him about the time I fucked the black maid."

"Evan, that's ridiculous. It's too corny."

"Well, I was seventeen." He selected a little piece of bread, dipped it in oil, and ate it with a pretty trill of his Adam's apple.

The waiter brought the oysters, and salads glistening and garnished with little pieces of toasted bread and the heads of sacrificed flowers. Laurel stared at the blossoms; they were pansies, and their rich purple and yellow hues were helplessly beautiful in the oily mass of lettuces.

"So what happened with you and the maid?" she asked. "Did you have an affair?"

"No. It was a one-time thing. We had flirted with each other for a long while and then one day when we were alone I asked her into my room to hear some music. We smoked some dope and started making out. She was only a year or so older than me and she was, like, too beautiful."

"What did you talk about with her?"

"Music, Jamaica—where she was from. Things you talk about when you know you're going to have sex."

"Did you get off on the idea that it was, you know, the maid?"

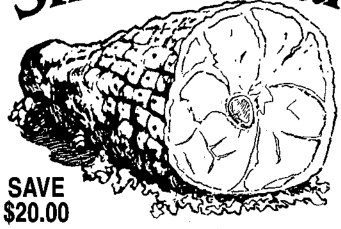
"It's funny, I didn't. I was really young, and I wasn't thinking about anything except that she was gorgeous and that I wanted to fuck her. But then my mom came home right after it happened, when we were coming out of my bedroom. I guess she knew what had gone on because she shook her head and said, 'Oh, Evvie!' in this sad, disapproving way. And that gave the whole thing a nice illicit charge. Like, afterward, when I'd see Lucille around the house."

In silence, they ravaged the dainty leaves and flowers, Evan exuberantly tucking escaping fronds back into his chewing lips. Laurel looked into the bright windows of the restaurant, at the mincing gestures of the other eaters. She looked at the narrow, jealously in-turned shoulders of a middle-aged woman in a natty pink jacket, which yelled out with a vibrancy that was cruelly smothered in knit. Her body language spoke of timidity, disappointment, and parsimony. All at once, everybody in the restaurant looked as though they were straining to have, through their absurdly expensive, unattractive clothing, an engagement with life that had so far eluded them.

"Race stuff is always complicated," she said. "When my car was in the shop and I had to take the city bus a few weeks ago? I had to wait a long time at this one bus stop where I was the only white person, and I was definitely the most flamboyantly dressed person there. And I was really self-conscious about being white."

"You were scared?"

"I was afraid that somebody would make fun of me. Mostly because there were a lot of teen-agers there, and teen-agers like to make fun of people, and I seemed to be a good target. I was just horribly self-conscious."



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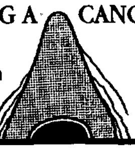

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"The last time I was in New York, I had a funny mass-transit experience," Evan said. "I was running to make the I.R.T., and it shut in my face, and I was mad, so I punched the door. The train sat there long enough for me to see these two young black guys inside mocking me for not getting the train. So I give 'em the finger. And the older one stands up, and—I don't know how to describe it—he didn't really grab his dick, but he put both hands on either side of it and sort of shook it at me, like a 'suck my dick' kind of thing. So I grab *my* dick and shake it and mouth the words 'suck my dick.' Naturally, at that moment the subway doors slowly rattle open."

"Really!"

"And they lunge at the door! Which closes in their faces! As the train pulls away, they're dissing me furiously through the window and I maintain the 'suck my dick' posture until they disappear into the tunnel."

"Gosh! That sounds like fun, in a way. Girls don't ever get to do that kind of thing. What could a woman say? 'Suck my tit!' You could grab your boob and shake it."

"I don't think that would have the desired effect."

"When I was in Venice once, this fat crazy guy ran up in my face and started yelling dirty stuff. He said, 'You fat-ass whore, spreading your pussy all over town.' And so on."

Evan dropped his oyster fork with almost feminine distaste. "If I'd been there when that happened? He'd be dead, and the world would be better."

"Well, I wonder what he would've done if I'd grabbed my breast and—"

"Bad idea, hon."

"I'm not serious, I just like the ludicrousness. But if I'd yelled at him the same way he was yelling at me, he might've secretly liked it. *I* might've. We could've bellowed all up and down the street, insulting everybody."

"It's really cute that you'd have that idea," he said. "You'd never do it, thank God. But I can imagine you telling him off in front of the mirror at home. I can see you stamping your little feet."

"Evan," she said. "Why do you always say things like that?"

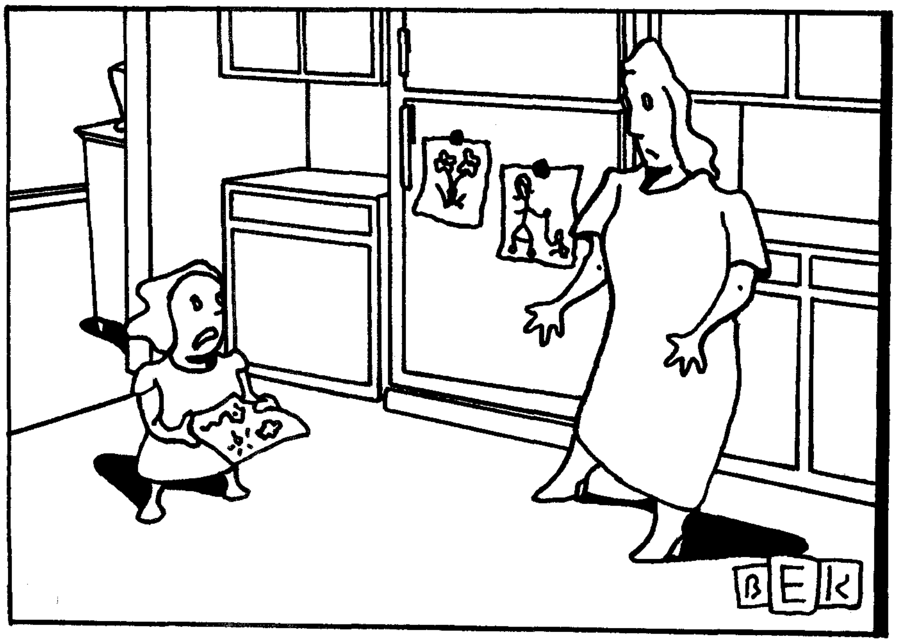
"What?"

"My cute idea, my stamping feet. I've never told the mirror off in my life. And I *have* yelled at people on the street. Just without the tit grab. Why are you always giving me this 'cute little' crap?"

"Because you are," he said seriously. "Because what I mean is—"

"I'm nine years older than you. I left home when I was sixteen, and I've worked for a living since then, in really crummy jobs until my business finally took off. You've never had a grunt job in your life. Your mama was still making the bed for you just two years ago. What are you talking about?"

His forehead tensely stood still, then slowly dropped into a painfully gentle ex-



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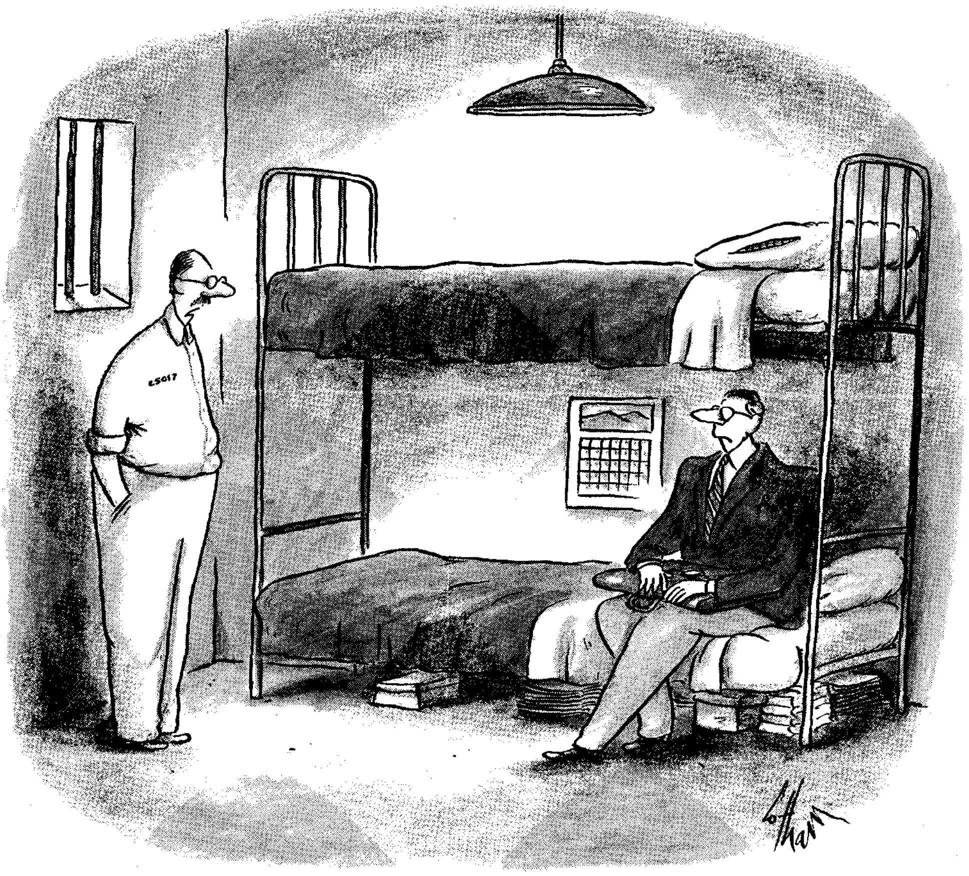

"In the novel based on my case, I'm acquitted."

• •

pression. "Because I don't— I know you've had a lot of experiences. But it's like it hasn't affected you, at least not in the way you'd expect. Like table dancing, and that old guy who supported you. . . . People would think that kind of thing would mean you were really compromised or something. But you're—you're the purest person I've ever known. I know it sounds maudlin. But you are."

Somewhat incongruously, Laurel suddenly remembered a story he had told her about his ex-girlfriend Chloe. He had gone to spend a weekend in Arizona with her and her disapproving Catholic parents, during which he'd snuck into her bedroom while the family was at Mass and, in the spirit of rebellion and iconoclasm, taken a nap in Chloe's pink, canopied, elaborately dust-ruffled bed. Although he had never been a bed wetter as a child, he woke a scant twenty minutes later in urine-soaked pink sheets and was forced to spend the next half hour in the laundry room, manically pacing as the machine moaned. Chloe had never said anything about the mattress, which had not responded well to his efforts with a little purple blow-dryer.

"Honey?" he said. "What is it? You look like—"

"Nothing." She reached for a glass of water. "I just— Nobody ever said that to me before."

"I know. And I don't understand why not. It's so obvious. I mean, there you are."

The waiter presented their dishes of food, meat and fish symmetrically striped from the grill, with bountiful color-coördinated vegetables. Laurel stared at the food, feeling funny. She had spent years hoping some crummy old boyfriend or other would say something like this to her. And now here it was, right in front of her, in a fancy restaurant no less.

Evan's expression as he ate was humble, even slightly chastened.

It grew dark and cold. She and Evan were the only diners left on the patio. The restaurant's paper lanterns bobbed in the private darkness. Laurel brooded. Evan talked some more about the men.

"I'm really worried about this article," he said. "Because I don't want to be facile. But these guys were pathetic. Even the older, sort of erudite ones."

"I'm a little disappointed," said Laurel. "I was hoping there'd be some guy upon whose huge, hairy chest you could lay your head. I mean, in a cathartic, dad kind of way."

"It's an interesting idea, but it didn't happen. One of the facilitators was an older guy who was a tiny bit fatherly, but he was bisexual and no way was I going to lay my head on *his* hairy chest. The main guy was really too bratty to be a dad figure. At times it seemed like the whole point of the retreat was for him to brag about his sexuality while these frustrated guys admired him."

"They couldn't have been totally frustrated. Didn't you say most of them were married?"

"Yeah, but even so. Like at one point we were supposed to reveal our insecurity with women? Even the married ones had all this worry and fear either about pleasing their wives or about whether or not they were really missing the action by being married and square. Meanwhile, our surfer-dude leader is prancing around talking about all his women."

"And did you reveal your insecurity? Or did you at least make something up?"

"I said I was insecure about you."

"Oh!"

Once again, Evan had redeemed his arrogance, at least as far as she was concerned; his acculturated self-love included an enthusiastic eagerness to love her. If he saw something about her that was unlovable, he embraced it with the greed of a child fascinated by a flawed toy, valued more for its idiosyncrasy than a new and perfect one would be. It wasn't just her, either. He joked and jollied grumpy grocers, deliverymen, and counter persons; he juiced exhausted old people and supported the shy. Really, he could be so nice it was ridiculous.

She remembered something else about the violated Chloe. "Before she met me, she was a wreck," he had said. "I was the one who got her focussed, who got her to major in journalism."

A waiter, muffled in darkness, approached them with wine. They accepted. Laurel took long drinks that made her throat feel sweet and fuzzy.

"When you had sex with the maid?"

"Yes?"

"Well, I was wondering, did you talk about it with her afterward? Were there any looks exchanged?"

"No. I saw her once outside the building with some black guy. I think he might've been her boyfriend."

Laurel waited. Evan picked at his pork-chop bone. He downed his glass of wine.

"And?" she said.

"And what?"

"What happened when you saw her outside?"

"We said hi."

"Wasn't it weird?"

"No. She was cool."

Laurel shifted in her chair. "Evan, did this woman have a green card?"

"I sense this conversation just took a turn for the worse. I don't think so, because I remember my mother helped her get one, and then she was pissed because Lucille quit immediately after that. I hate where I think you're going with this."

"Do you have some reason to hate it?"

"Oh, come *on.*"

"Well, I was just wondering. Because when girls are attracted to you, they want to, like, go on a date, or at least hang out and talk. And she knew that wasn't going to happen with you. You were sort of the boss, except you couldn't even give her a goddam raise."

"No," he said. "No, no, no. It wasn't a boss thing, it wasn't a victimized-underclass thing. I basically acted with her like I acted with every other pretty girl I met when I was seventeen. We did hang out and talk! We listened to music! I would've done the same thing if she were white, if she were the neighbor's daughter!"

"But would she?"

"Why not?" He paused, a momentary uncertainty crossing his face. "Although at one point she did go for the door."

"She *ran* for the door?"

"No, she didn't run for the door. She suddenly changed her mind and got up to leave. She was saying something about her religion and birth control—"

"I can't stand it! Damn it Evan, you raped the maid."

"If you want to pick a fight with me, surely you can do better."

"Yeah, I could lecture you about your condescending attitudes toward those

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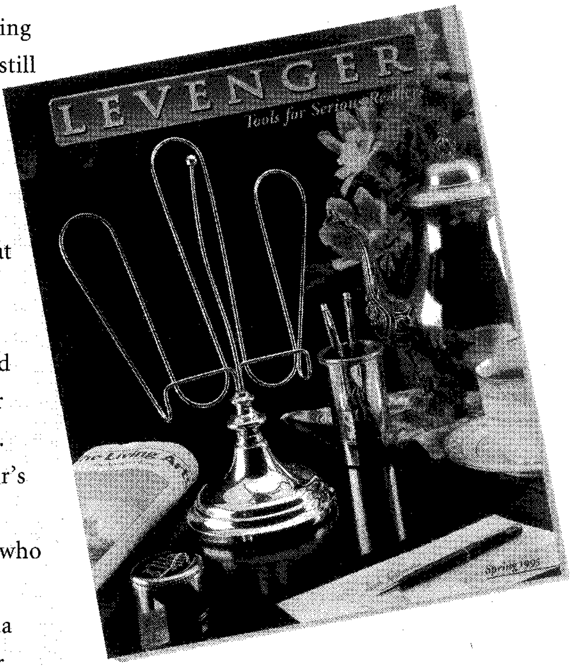

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'pathetic' men, most of whom work their butts off to support families. But at least you kept your mitts off them."

"This is so unfair!"

"Girls don't talk about religion and birth control when they want to do it with you."

"Are you kidding? That's a practical matter; of course they talk about it. As soon as I said I'd pull out, she was O.K. with it."

Laurel imagined the Jamaican girl trying to get out the door, which was suddenly body-blocked by a large, strong blond boy, the son of her employer. "God, you probably did rape her," she said, wondering. "And you don't even know it."

"I did not rape anyone!" Evan bawled. "If I did I would certainly know it!"

A waiter presented himself with a feline tact that was almost obnoxious. Laurel demanded the check; Evan cried out for Scotch.

"I should get outraged and storm out," Laurel said.

"No!" Evan lunged forward and grabbed her hand.

"Scotch for the gentleman." The waiter made his dry announcement in mid-retreat.

"She probably didn't want to have sex with me, totally. But neither do a lot of girls who wind up doing it with you. Maybe I did do something a tiny bit bad, but not that bad. You have to understand, I treated women horribly at that age. I was interested in sex, not relationships."

"But this was different. She wasn't a peer. For all she knew, if she said no, you would make up some shit and tell your mom and get her fired, maybe deported. And I can't believe you were so naïve you didn't know that."

"Laurel, that was not what was going on."

"Why was she trying to get out the door?"

"She was probably worried that *doing* it with me would get her in trouble, not the other way around. She kept saying my mother might come home."

The waiter brought the Scotch, and Evan sipped from it without speaking. He sat on one hip, his body turned sideways, one long leg crossing the other at a slightly persnickety angle. Grudgingly, Laurel admired his nervous grace. She crossed her own legs and sniffed. It had become uncomfortably cold on the patio.

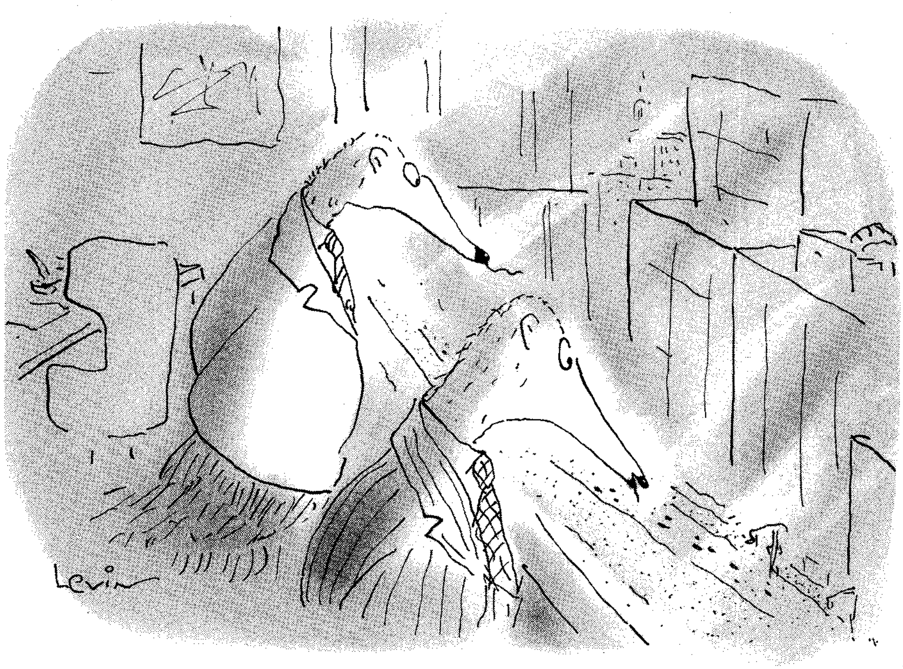
"I almost wish I *had* raped her," said Evan. "Then this conversation would be tragedy instead of farce."

"You're such a little snot."

"You're so sanctimonious."

They sat in stiffly individuated silence. Laurel crossed her legs more tightly, winding her calves together and tucking the toes of one foot tautly behind the opposite ankle.

"Let me try again," she said. "Your fantasies are all about raping secretaries



"Now that you mention it, they do look like ants."

and victimizing teen-age girls. You want to pretend I'm a thirteen-year-old incest victim even though I'm older than you."

"Oh, is this what we're really arguing about?"

"Look, your fantasies are on a par with mine, and that's cool with me. But I can't believe you weren't into a big power trip with that girl who just happened to be a black maid. And it seems like you don't understand the difference between fantasy and reality about half the time. Like when I told you I'd done assembly-line work and you asked if I did it for the experience? Like you didn't understand that some people actually have to do that kind of work for money, because you never had to do it."

"I said that because I don't think you should've had to do that kind of work."

They sat quietly. She could no longer see his face, but in the darkness his form was austere and upright. He was very present in his indignation, fully occupying his solid haunches and his broad, open chest. Even in his foolish self-certainty, Evan had a strength that moved her, and, at that moment, she had an intimation of how his strength would mature as he grew. Evan was a big, good-looking boy; was it so surprising if the maid had wanted to imbibe a little of this exuberant animal with his cruelty and kindness and heat all rolled together in a confused bundle of young maleness?

"What goes on between you and me is complicated," he was saying. "I show you things I don't show other people. What happened with me and Lucille when I was seventeen was not complicated. It was of the moment, and we were both participating."

Laurel imagined the maid sitting on the side of the bed, reapplying her lipstick. Laurel's indignation and empathy hovered about the imaginary Lucille, trying to attach itself to her. But the maid, annoyed, shrugged it off; it fell on the floor, and Lucille stepped over it as she left the room, with Evan cheerfully bringing up the rear. Mom tsk-tsked. Life continued apace.

"It's actually pretty funny," she said. "You come back from the male-sexuality workshop and get in a fight with your earnest girlfriend about raping the maid."

"Which I didn't even do." Evan laughed, heartily and with relief.

Once again, Laurel felt the abrasion of thought and feeling, close together but running in opposite directions. She took his cold hand and held it. They gave each other shy, tiny squeezes and rubbed each other's palms with absurdly small and sensitive finger movements.

"So you never told me what you gave Loki the love god."

"A cube of sugar. From the snack table."

"Aww."

"You should've seen the other guys. They went out and gathered bunches of clover, they cut valentines out of red handkerchiefs, somebody took off his pinkie ring. It was heartrending—and I don't mean pathetic. I mean, it was emotionally agonizing to see all that hope and want."

She absolutely loved him. She also doubted she would be involved with him for longer than a year or two. Instead of sadness, she experienced a pleasing visceral agitation that made her feel greedy. She inhaled with her mouth open and savored the cold intake on her palate.

"Come on, you big meatball," she said. "Let's get out of here. It's fucking freezing."

Inside, the restaurant was a triumph of controlled light and warmth. Most of its spacious rooms were newly vacant; there were half-eaten desserts on white plates, cups of cold, creamy coffee, and crushed napkins faintly marked with lipstick. In the central room, an enormous bunch of flowers rose up out of an enormous vase; beneath it, a handsomely dressed old couple lingered over bevelled glasses of liqueur, and a handsome waiter cleared a table with desultory grace. Laurel saw Lucille reach for the door, the knob slipping in her sweating hand before her grasp was obstructed; she rode home on a rattling subway train, eating a candy bar. The subway roared in the dark tunnel, the lights flickered off and on. A sharp pain shot up Laurel's calf and she grunted in surprise as she sat down hard, right over her twisted ankle.

"Oh, honey!" Evan exclaimed tenderly as he bent toward her.

The old people watched with subtle approval as Evan easily bore Laurel up in his arms. She embraced his neck and leaned into him. As he carried her out the door she looked over his shoulder; the bright beauty of the massive flower arrangement fairly hit her in the eye. ♦

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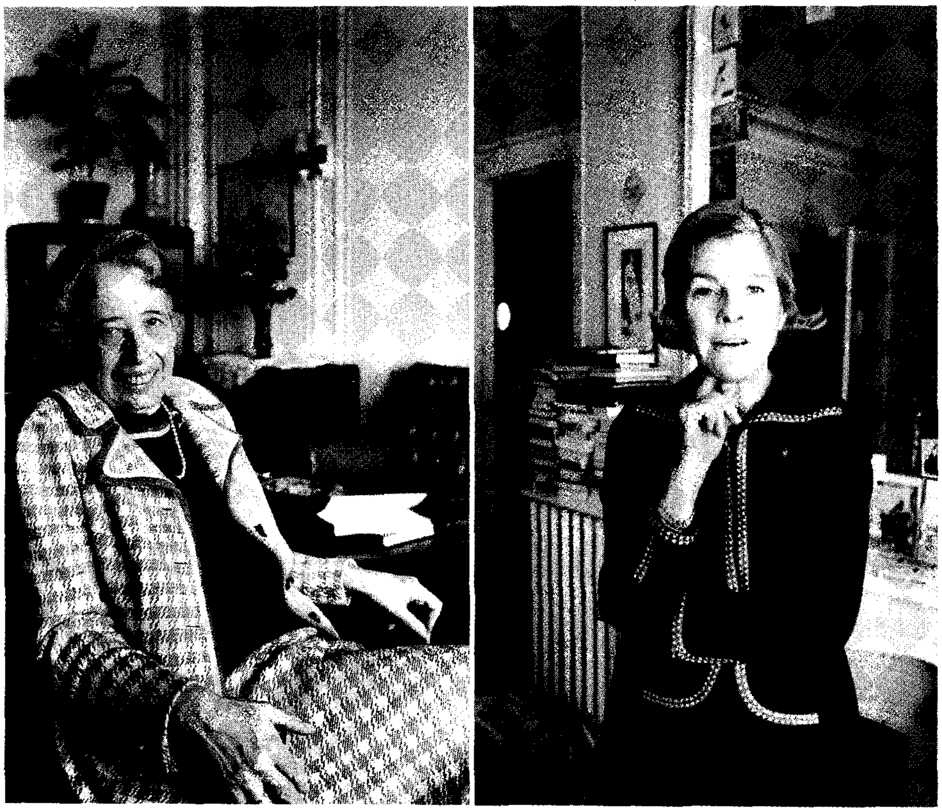
BOOKS

HEARTS AND MINDS

The letters of Hannah Arendt and Mary McCarthy.

BY CLAUDIA ROTH PIERPONT

DECLARING pity for Hitler, in the spring of 1945, proved to be more cleverness than even the company around Mary McCarthy could bear, and the party gave way to a scene. Hannah Arendt, who had got out of Germany the same year that McCarthy got out of Vassar, demanded to know how McCarthy dared say such a thing "in front of me—a victim of Hitler, a person who has been in a concentration camp!" McCarthy had not intended a moral or political statement, needless to say. In fact, she held few strong opinions about the war, beyond a sense of accord with other *Partisan Review* thinkers that it had really been none of "our" business. Her intellectual celebrity and dauntless cultural criticism notwithstanding, McCarthy's politics were cliquish and literary, and her attention to the devastation of Europe had been confined to appraisals of war movies and war correspondents. Her point that evening was a matter of social psychology: it was Hitler's longing for the love of the Parisians, even while he occupied their city, that struck her as so uncomprehending as to be pitiable. McCarthy's usual audience would have been able to hear in this display of ingenuous wonder its author's well-known love of shock and contradiction, and also the giddy sense of political imagery that marked her rueful autobiographical stories—stories in which wives collapsed from within like France and the unconscious was a Soviet prison and the message was always entirely self-conscious and personal. The message this time seemed to be that, unlike Hitler, Mary McCarthy knew better than to expect love from her victims.



Arendt and McCarthy: Three decades of philosophy, outrage, and marital advice.

JILL KREMENTZ

It was not a message that Hannah Arendt was equipped to hear, and, deaf to excuses, she stalked off to upbraid their host, Philip Rahv, for the kind of talk he allowed in his apartment. ("How can you . . . you, a Jew?") Thus began the standoff between two of the most intellectually and temperamentally opposed women anybody knew, which lasted for almost four unspeaking years, until Arendt approached McCarthy on a cold New York subway platform following a meeting for a political magazine and uttered the propitiatory words "We two think so much alike." From this richly productive lie grew one of the literary world's most loyal friendships, lasting until Arendt's death, a quarter of a century later. McCarthy, shortly before her own death, in 1989, assisted her biographer, Carol Brightman, in collecting and editing the letters that form the record of this improbable alliance. And it no longer seems, after all, so improbable. Anchoring the bouts of gossip and philosophy, the professional outrages and the marital arbitrations of "Between Friends: The Correspondence of Hannah Arendt and Mary McCarthy, 1949-1975" (Harcourt Brace; $34.95), is the conviction of two erect and stubborn souls that the life of the mind and the communion of friendship have been their only means of survival. Emerging from their distantly opposed corners of experience, these women shared not a way of thinking but a deeply aggrieved and implacable sense of justice. And a ready willingness to play the judge.

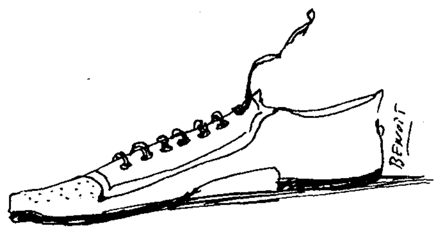
"I'VE read your book, absorbed, for the past two weeks, in the bathtub, riding in the car, waiting in line in the grocery store," McCarthy proclaims at the start of her first letter, in 1951. The golden girl of the smartest set, the literary mistress of trysts in upper berths and morning-after abashment, McCarthy had fled New York, had married for the third time, and was claiming to have more serious matters on her mind. The volume balanced on her soapy knees and accompanying the calm domesticity of her days in a rambling house in Rhode Island was "The Origins of Totalitarianism," four hundred and seventy-seven pages hardbound—a book that Arendt had begun writing in 1945, overcoming her sense of "speechless outrage and impotent horror."

Arendt's original, driving aim, openly declared in the early outlines of this masterwork, was to argue against the inevitability of history, and to show that the Nazi catastrophe could have been avoided. The unsettling aspect of this argument was Arendt's insistence that the Jews themselves must face up to a significant measure of responsibility for their fate. In the completed book, she charges the Jews with having been politically unaware and, historically, with having chosen the conditions of isolation and self-mythologizing racial antagonism that were to be turned against them to such monstrous effect.

Arendt's point about Jewish history was diffused and her fury generally disguised by the book's extraordinary armature of scholarship and its dazzling exploration of anti-Semitism, of racism, and of nineteenth-century imperialism, the forces that in her view had prepared for the twin totalitarian states of Hitler and Stalin. About economics or Marxism as a historical force, she had little to say. She exonerated her revered German culture from a leading role in the development of Nazi anti-Semitism, locating the Nazis' ideological sources, through a series of impressive intellectual contortions, in the European institutionalization of racism in colonial Africa. The fact that Stalinism was in no way as dependent on anti-Semitic ideology as Nazism was did not deflect her from her theory of their common origins: Arendt did not write a balanced book, or an objective one. When McCarthy went on to say that she found the book "engrossing and fascinating in the way that a novel is," it was not mere hyperbole or a convention of speech but a typically clear and frank insight, and unusual for its time. In fact, Arendt's immensely powerful and tragic book is as much a work of literature as a work of history, with its echoes of Conrad and Kafka, Orwell and Yeats, rebounding upon a hell that men had actually built.

Arendt concluded that these totalitarian states were profoundly united by an unprecedented form of evil. This evil operated in a realm beyond discernible motive and triumphed in the terror and anonymity of the police state and, above all, in the concentration camps. The Nazis' destruction of individuality and conscience compelled even their victims toward moral compromise; their obliteration of all sympathetic witness made resistance meaningless and martyrdom impossible. By force of this "radical evil," Arendt argued, death itself had been changed. For McCarthy, however, the very idea of such omnipotence—for evil, or for good—was unacceptable. She objects to the way Arendt seems to credit the Nazis and Stalin with a deep political knowledge and with an ability to interpret their times "as a great *maitre* would have done," in McCarthy's slightly self-consciously Europeanizing words. She insists that many features of these regimes fell into place "without anyone's cleverness, simply because they worked." Instinctively, it seems, McCarthy hints at a revolutionary notion that will explode a decade later, with "Eichmann in Jerusalem" and Arendt's formulation of "the banality of evil"—a notion that will overturn many of the essential moral conclusions of the earlier book. Here is a subject that continually resurfaces in these women's letters, in one form or another, as it does in so much of their work: the sources and powers of evil, the possibility of goodness, the durability of the moral impulse. For both women, these matters were personal, obsessive, and suffocatingly close.

ARENDT'S own history has made her credentials, if not her compulsions, as a moralist very clear. Born into an assimilated Prussian family in 1906, brought up on Goethe, she existed in an unstable, oxymoronic condition—German Jew—that she believed only Heine had mastered without fraud or bitterness. Her mother had taught her to walk straight and silent out the schoolroom door when she was subjected to a teacher's anti-Semitic taunts; when she was taunted by other children, she was to stay and fight. Decades later, she recalled that it was by keeping to these rules that she had learned to preserve her dignity, and had managed to keep her soul from being poisoned while learning what it was to be a Jew.



Poetry and philosophy, not politics, were her natural interests. At university, she wrote a dissertation on St. Augustine and studied philosophy with Heidegger—who became her lover and remained her private god until he joined the Nazi Party, in 1933, the year she left for France. She brought out with her almost nothing but the manuscript of a biography she had written, "Rahel Varnhagen," about an intellectual Jewish woman of the Enlightenment. In Paris, Arendt worked for a Jewish relief agency. At the start of the war, she was interned by the French in a camp for resident Germans, in Gurs; she was liberated weeks later, when France collapsed before the Nazi army.

Arendt had misled McCarthy about her wartime experience. She easily could have ended up in a German camp: for those German Jews who stayed on in Gurs long enough to have their crime switched from the "German" part of their identity to the "Jewish," the only way out was on a train to Auschwitz. But Arendt walked straight and silent out of Gurs before it was too late, and in 1941 she sailed to New York with her second husband, a disillusioned German Communist named Heinrich Blücher. Safely resettled, she fought for two causes: during the war, for the establishment of a Jewish army to fight Hitler "as a European people"; after it, against the establishment of Israel. That is, she stood for proud self-defense on the European battlefield and against abandoning it even in the bitterest defeat. Seeing both causes fail, she did not willingly assume any others. In 1949, at forty-three, Arendt was entirely taken up with the impossible task of understanding the past.

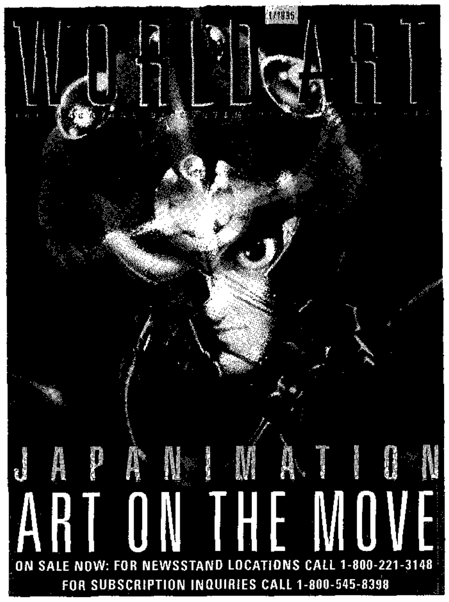
McCarthy was just then embracing a new and expanded life of moral action—or, at least, of resolutely lesser solipsism. The war had become real to her only in the summer of 1945, and she had formed a committee to send money and books to needy writers abroad. McCarthy had long seen her life as a moral testing ground, a result of the infamously brutalized childhood she recorded in "Memories of a Catholic Girlhood": the sudden death of both parents when she was six; her entrustment to a vicious uncle for five years, marked by beatings and such inventive punishments as having her mouth taped shut at night; the rescue by her grandfather, long after she had abandoned any thought of rescue. McCarthy, too, had felt the breath of evil on her cheek, and, ironically, it is her testimony that evokes the bleak bewilderment of a survivor: "We thought it only natural that grandparents should know and do nothing, for did not God in the mansions of Heaven look down upon human suffering and allow it to take its course?"

The long aftermath of this cruel upbringing was an almost equally infamous struggle with moral context and scale: the dilemma of what to do with heroic principles in a life not large enough to live them out. As an adult, McCarthy's heaviest burden of conscience, much confessed in print, was a habit of falling into bed with men she didn't like and marrying men she didn't love. Edmund Wilson, her second husband (of four), had "dragooned" her into marriage, in 1938, and into writing fiction. She wrote her best stories, about trying to escape from Wilson, before she finally managed it, in 1945, and turned to European thinkers for reading lists and inspiration. Arendt was not McCarthy's first Continental crush, but she was her most valued and satisfying one, for she was just what McCarthy's intellectual ardor required: a teacher, as pure and above suspicion as the nuns who had first won McCarthy's heart and mind—the heart through the mind—at convent school, and, like the good sisters, a somewhat formidable guide to principles for which one could truly and rightly suffer.

Although McCarthy was only six years younger than Arendt, the gap between their ages seems wider by virtue of McCarthy's being an American (Arendt generally thought of her American friends as children), and her early letters suggest a youthful courtship. She fears that she is boring, she worries over her lack of erudition and gravity ("petty but at any rate human," she half apologizes for one typical opinion), and she veers between her uniquely vivid common sense and a grievous attempt to put on something more *hochphilosophisch:* it is difficult to imagine McCarthy telling anyone else that the novel she was working on ("A Charmed Life") concerned "the shattered science of epistemology." And Arendt plays her own part to the fullest: in one letter she blithely refutes what she calls "the oldest fallacy of Western philosophy," assuring McCarthy that "truth . . . is always the beginning of thought," and not the other way around—no matter what Socrates and all the rest may have said. It does sometimes seem as though Mme. de Staël were writing to Becky Sharp. But one of the deepest pleasures of this book is to see how each woman comes to fill a role that neither could have imagined: how in their years of crisis McCarthy becomes Arendt's most trusted intellectual defender, while Arendt becomes an adviser of genuine wisdom on matters of love.

ARENDT missed McCarthy's final wedding, in Paris, in April of 1961, because the trial of Adolph Eichmann had opened in Jerusalem just a few days before. In McCarthy's convoluted romantic affairs, Arendt had progressed from shielded outsider to confidante and then to conspirator—rerouting mail to McCarthy's (third) husband, Bowden Broadwater, from a country where his wife was not supposed to be, and gently bringing the loyal but unloved No. 3 around to the idea of a divorce. "I think this is a catastrophe for him," Arendt writes McCarthy, "and it is still better than no catastrophe ever." In letters filled with maternal tenderness, Arendt consoles and cheers and occasionally reprimands, and follows all of "dear Mary" 's theatrical turns and twists, while making hardly a reference to any private existence of her own.

Visits and telephone calls must have filled in much that here seems missing. Still, so extreme is the sense of Arendt's lofty distance from life's mere details—from the food and weather and sex and love that brim over in McCarthy's letters, along with gardens and Danish modern and insolent maids—that McCarthy's casual reference to an Arendtian opinion on double beds (ap-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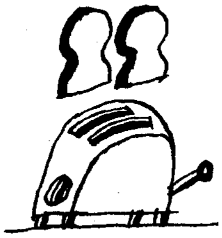
parently negative) comes as a bit of a shock. And there seems something almost blasphemous in Brightman's editorial additions of McCarthy's mischievous conversational asides: her suspicion that Arendt had an affair with Harold Rosenberg in the early sixties, and, rather more important, her conviction that Heidegger was the "great love affair" of Arendt's life.

Although Arendt denounced Heidegger, in 1946, for his enthusiastic service to the Nazis as rector at Freiburg, it appears to be true that their relationship resumed when she visited Germany in 1949. In a final tribute to National Socialism's most controversial intellectual figure, near the end of Arendt's life, she wrote in worshipful forgiveness of the man she called "the hidden king" of the realm of the mind: as with Plato, such essential thinking could not be held accountable for mere results. The correspondence of Arendt and Heidegger has been deposited in the Deutsches Literaturarchiv, in Marbach, but is currently sealed against scholarly inquiry. Despite a scrupulous 1982 biography of Arendt by Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, much of the woman remains hidden from the world, by her own design. It is a question just how much remained hidden from Hannah Arendt herself.



"EICHMANN IN JERUSALEM," the work that earned Arendt a still furiously debated renown, is a reporter's account of the first major Nazi trial in Israel, and is also, for much of its length, a product of evident pain and anger. Like "The Origins of Totalitarianism," it hovers somewhere between history and polemic, with swellings into poetry, and it betrays the embattled pride of an author for whom being a German Jew was still a far from resolved condition. In Israel for the trial, Arendt was often miserable and alienated; letters to her old mentor Karl Jaspers deplore the "oriental mob" outside the courtroom doors. In the very first paragraph of "Eichmann" she complains, almost comically, of the poor quality of the trial's German simultaneous translation; within a few pages, she is comparing the Israeli laws on marriage (Heinrich Blücher was not a Jew) to the Nuremberg Laws; variations on the theme of "lambs to the slaughter" occur half a dozen times in her opening account of the issues at stake. But it is her contemptuous treatment of the Jewish Councils' coöperation with Nazi authorities—a well-documented if complex and anguishing matter—that proved to be the truly incendiary element in Arendt's book. Mixing techniques of emphasis and omission, Arendt stresses the culpability of these wretched Councils, while removing them from their equally wretched context of torturing decisions and hopes (a context that she showed full awareness of elsewhere). By these means, Arendt mounts the accusation—head on and inescapable this time—that the Jews were in part accountable for their own destruction. She argues that without direct Jewish coöperation the number of Jews murdered during the war would have been drastically reduced.

For Arendt, one must assume, even the awful burden of responsibility was preferable to the humiliation of the helpless victim. To deliver blame to one's own people was to deliver control, and to suggest that a future was possible. And yet her pitiless righteousness, and the great height from which she peers down at those whose choices she had never faced, make reading her judgments, even today, an unnerving experience.

Arendt claimed to be astonished by the uproar that broke out over "Eichmann in Jerusalem," which appeared in five installments in *The New Yorker*, in February and March of 1963, and as a slightly expanded book that May. The Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith issued bulletins against it; the Council of Jews from Germany pleaded with her to stop publication; innumerable articles claimed that by exaggerating the complicity of the victims and emphasizing the ordinariness of the defendant—the book was subtitled "A Report on the Banality of Evil"—she had written a defense of Eichmann. By the fall, reactions had reached a level that McCarthy, with her abidingly delicate sense of political metaphor, termed "a pogrom." Urging Arendt to defend her ideas, McCarthy received the testy reply that "there are no 'ideas' in this Report, there are only facts with a few conclusions." She also received a closely typed four-page memorandum, not included among the letters published here, in which Arendt refuted the charges brought against her and suggested that McCarthy herself do something about them.

She could have chosen no better candidate for the job. The controversial concept of "the banality of evil" which Arendt had derived from the cliché-ridden person of Eichmann was prefigured in McCarthy's startlingly similar account of the character of Macbeth—"the only Shakespeare hero who conforms to a bourgeois type: a murderous Babbitt"—in a compelling 1962 essay, which Arendt had warmly praised. And in August, 1963, after eleven years of work, McCarthy had published her big novel, "The Group," the critical reception of which had made her the second most vilified woman in American letters: "Combining being upset for you and upset for myself has made my head spin," McCarthy wrote. "There is no cheek left to turn." What McCarthy produced for her friend was a diatribe called "The Hue and Cry," which appeared in *Partisan Review*, and which was in parts so morally devastating and in other parts so clumsy that, while Arendt's publisher in Munich requested its use in the German edition of "Eichmann," everywhere else it only made her troubles worse.

In her most provocative statement, McCarthy had pronounced Arendt's work "a paean of transcendence," comparing it to the uplifting final choruses of Mozart's "Figaro" and Handel's "Messiah," in which "a pardon or redemption of some sort was taking place." She had never imagined, as she burst out to Arendt, "that anybody would use it to show that I was exulting over the mass murder of the Jews." McCarthy's choice of comparisons may seem as deliberately perverse as her long-ago remark about Hitler. But there is one passage in Arendt's exploration of the Holocaust to which McCarthy's improbable notion of redemption clearly applies—a stunning passage that reverses much of what Arendt had earlier proclaimed about the invincibility of the totalitarian state.

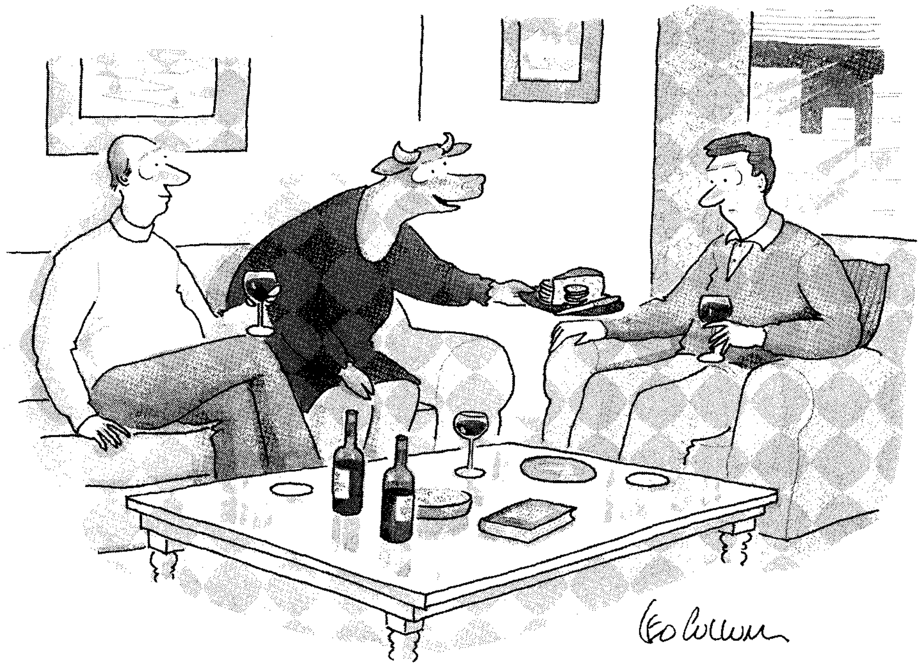
In the ultimate triumph of "radical evil," as Arendt had defined it in "The Origins of Totalitarianism," individual acts of conscience or goodness disappeared without a trace into cunningly wrought "holes of oblivion," which had made death not life's natural end but its negation. Now, in a late chapter of "Eichmann in Jerusalem," discussing the single case of Sergeant Anton Schmidt, a German soldier who had helped Jewish partisans and then been executed, Arendt concludes that the resistance of even one man provides a moral and philosophical counterweight to the machinery of annihilation. Because, after all, we do remember Anton Schmidt. Because nothing made by humans can function perfectly, because in this, at least, the Nazis labored in vain. Experience has shown that there will always be some people who do not comply with terror, always one man who lives to tell the story. "The holes of oblivion do not exist." When Arendt replied to McCarthy's frantic apology "about the Mozart business," she disclaimed the high comparison but confessed that she had loved it: "you were the only reader to understand what otherwise I have never admitted—namely that I wrote this book in a curious state of euphoria."

McCarthy was meanwhile completing the project of enlarging her life. From the early sixties on, she lived mostly in Paris, writing novels filled with big ideas (for "Birds of America" she appeals to Arendt for a picture of Kant, who is to make a personal appearance) and essays about the vital political issues of the day. Whatever this principled self-consciousness did for her soul, for her work it was a disaster. McCarthy failed to find the moral urgency she'd sought in Europe, and it was as a dilettantish outsider that she reported on Vietnam, on the Medina trial, on Watergate. (Arendt apparently discouraged her from writing on the moon landing.) Domestically settled, she became intellectually promiscuous, falling into relationships with ideas and events for which her feeling was shallow and forced. In her fiction—and McCarthy had no dearer goal than to be a grand novelist, in the tradition of George Eliot—she broke out of her narrow social confines only to discover that they were her talent's natural home. Nothing rings more simply and unhappily true than the words with which, in 1975, the woman who corrected everyone and conquered everything confronts her limits: "It is sad to realize that one's fictions, i.e., one's 'creative' side, cannot learn anything. *I* have learned, I think, but they, or it, haven't. . . . It all leads to the awful recognition that one *is* one's life; God is not mocked."

For her part, Arendt could not hold on to the sense of moral shelter she had sought in America. She was deeply discouraged by the war in Vietnam—she writes McCarthy in 1968 that Johnson seems "not just 'bad' or stupid but kind of insane"—but she refused to participate in the resistance activities McCarthy urged upon her. ("I signed one of the many protests and that is that," she writes in the same year. "I don't intend to make a profession of it.") Although her public writings continued to address a variety of political problems, in private she was increasingly concerned with a single issue: the fate of Israel. Arendt never relented in her criticism of the very foundations of the Jewish state, but in these years she reacted to every new threat to its safety with a fearful urgency. "One could not live there, of course," she writes, and yet "I know that any real catastrophe in Israel would affect me more deeply than almost anything else."

When her husband died, in 1970, Arendt almost gave him a Jewish funeral, out of her longing to hear the Kaddish. To McCarthy, in 1972, she explained the meaning of the Jewish death prayers, which praise God even in a time of mourning: "To be taken away it had first to be given. If you believed you owned, if you forgot that it was given, that is just too bad for you." And in 1975, only months before her death, Arendt celebrated Passover among friends who had not welcomed her since the publication of "Eichmann." There remain many others, however, who cannot forgive her to this day, and who, perhaps, should not be expected to try. Yet Arendt's last years have tremendous pathos, and it is hard not to think of her own "Rahel Varnhagen," the manuscript she carried out of Germany in 1933, which begins with her heroine's deathbed cry: "What a history! . . . The thing which all my life seemed to me the greatest shame, which was the misery and misfortune of my life—having been born a Jewess—this I should on no account now wish to have missed."

When Arendt died, the piece of paper rolled into her typewriter was headed "Judging," and its only text was a pair of epigraphs, from Lucan and from Goethe. The task of assembling this essay from lecture notes and then editing and "Englishing" its companions—to produce Arendt's final volume, "The Life of the Mind"—fell to Arendt's literary executor, Mary McCarthy. McCarthy spent two years of mixed drudgery and elation on the project. Without the letters, one would not



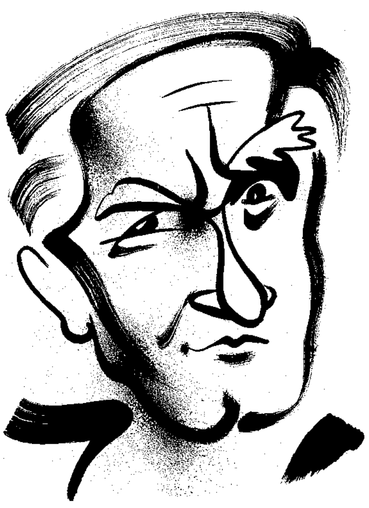
"Barry made the wine. I made the cheese."

know that she had read much of the material before and had disagreed sharply over a central point: the human faculty in which a sense of morality is born and resides. Arendt had argued for the mind, McCarthy for the heart, each finally trying to locate something not so very different: the elusive source of imaginative sympathy by which we think or feel ourselves into the flesh of another. But each woman, unyielding, holds up her holiest emblem, like the figures of Synagoga and Ecclesia on the Rhenish churches that McCarthy dreamed of studying. “I find the Synagogue figure very poetic,” McCarthy had written affectionately just a few years before Arendt died. “She is almost always more beautiful in her melancholy than the Church, her sister.” As this correspondence closes, there is some consolation in the larger, architectural view: across the portal of literature, before the cathedral of history, the two sisters, so exalted in aim and human in error, straining upward and holding forth in loving disagreement until the Day of Judgment. ♦

LE CARRÉ'S GAME

British spies soldier on in a thawed world.

BY JOHN UPDIKE

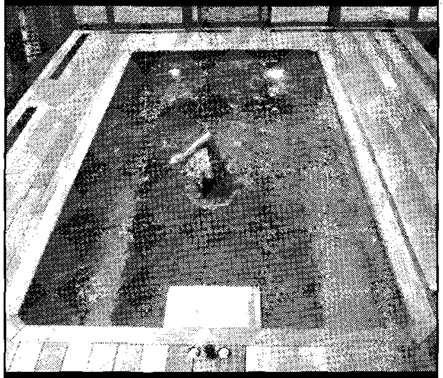


John le Carré

PAUL HAMLYN

SOMEHOW I missed out on all those Cold War thrillers. I would get on an airplane and see these many men in business suits—rather, in business trousers, with their jackets nicely folded in the overhead rack and their neckties loosened away from their shirt collars an artful inch—staring meaningfully into a tubby paperback or gargantuan hardcover of Clancy or Ludlum or Forsyth or le Carré, and I would suffer a pang of awe at a genre that could furnish such serious escapism to the society's serious people, the white male power brokers, the airborne harbingers of the free world's deals. But when I peeked into these evidently absorbing tomes I got a suffocating gray impression of armaments catalogues and code nerds and excessively factual dialogue elucidating how every double-cross had another behind it and all roads led to a vast distrust. I did once read John le Carré's “The Spy Who Came In from the Cold,” and though its details are lost in the same fog as those of older engines of suspense by Graham Greene and Eric Ambler, which I consumed as a credulous boy, there was a bitter something at the end of a metal bridge in Berlin that left an enduring taste in my mouth. Or maybe that was from the movie, with Richard Burton. These books tended to get made into movies, and a common difficulty for me began with the appearance of an actor playing the President of the United States, when I knew that there had been *no such President.* To be thrilling, a political thriller has to mess with history, and history is messy enough, thanks.

Anyway, the end of the Cold War should have put an end to Cold War thrillers. But it hasn't, as John le Carré demonstrates with his new novel, “Our Game” (Knopf; $24). Le Carré has already exhibited magical powers in persuading hundreds of thousands of American readers that the forces of British espionage were a staunch and canny bulwark against the Red Menace, contrary to local reports that the United States did the heavy lifting for the free world and that the British secret service was distinguished chiefly by the multitude of Cambridge-educated pro-Communist moles the old-boy network had myopically sheltered



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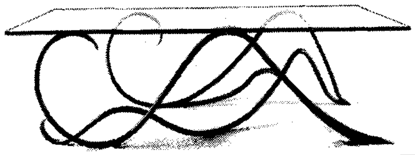

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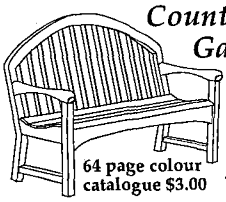

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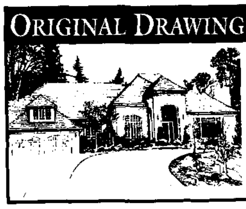

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while they pumped London's and Washington's secrets straight into the Kremlin cisterns. Americans in the movies made from le Carré's novels are a negligible and loutish lot, and this latest tale of good old English derring-do awards the United States only a sneer—"the world's only superpower . . . America the great policeman." We fail, it seems, to sufficiently support the tiny bedevilled romantic semi-states of the North Caucasus. Now that the Soviet Empire is pretending not to be there, your typical British spy, as personified in "Our Game" by the former double agent Larry Pettifer, continues to battle Russia, this time on behalf not of his sceptered isle and demi-paradise but of the unjustly obscure Muslim entity of Ingushetia. It exists: you can find it on a map, north of Georgia and south of the no longer obscure Chechnya. The Ingush made up ten per cent of the Checheno-Ingush Autonomous Republic, of which the Chechen fraction declared its independence from Russia in 1991. Le Carré has shown prescience in selecting one of the thawed world's sore spots, but has been unlucky, perhaps, in the immediacy of the grim headlines from Grozny. Fiction and news create a blurred double image. The reader, learning to suffer with Ingushetia, feels in the right church but the wrong pew. And why is the most prominent Ingush character called Checheyev?

Le Carré writes well, even fancily:

> The hill was steep, and the house a stern old lady with her feet firmly planted amid elderly friends. She had a Sunday school face and a stained-glass porch that glowed like heaven in the morning sun. She had pious lace curtains and a hint of grief, and boxed hedges and a bird table and a chestnut tree that was shedding gold leaves. The hill's gorse summit rose behind her like the green hill in the hymn, and behind the hill lay several different heavens: blue for sunshine, black for judgment, and the clear white sky of the north.

This is an arms dealer's house in Macclesfield, mind. Le Carré's prose has an overheated expertise about it, as if it wished to be doing something other than spinning a thriller. Our narrator, Timothy Cranmer, has developed a curious device of putting flashbacks in the present tense and action in the past; whom he is telling everything to, with all his cagey withholdings and painfully gradual revelations, is not explained. He spends the first half of the novel circling around a triangle that developed when his live-in mistress, Emma Manzini, a much younger, musical beauty whom he rescued from a rough London life of odd concerts and casual couplings for the stability of an old Somerset mansion complete with vineyards and chapel, fell in love with the erudite, dishevelled, neo-Byronic Larry Pettifer, who is three years younger than Cranmer and has been a friend since they were boys together at Winchester, one of those unfortunately formative English boarding schools. Cranmer protected him from schoolboy cruelties then, and later, as an Operational Man for the Office, enlisted him as a British spy also in the employ of the K.G.B. Both men have been rather unceremoniously dumped from the government payroll. "Cold Warriors of forty-seven don't recycle, Tim," Cranmer is told. "You're all far too nice." What emerges from a great deal of artful circumlocution is that though Cranmer minds the elegant, sexy Emma's being stolen from him by his old partner in espionage, his real fascination and—dare one say?—love remain with the breezily caddish Larry. This reader had the problem of taking such a dislike to Larry that to the bitter end I had hopes of his being revealed, in a cunning thriller twist, as the betrayer rather than the would-be savior of beleaguered Ingushetia. I was wrong. We are meant to take him straight, as a latter-day Byron dying for Greece, or as another Aubrey Hubert, who gave his all for Albania.

"Our game" is what the boys at Winchester used to call their peculiar version of football, and there is something of boyish daydream about "Our Game." We are asked to believe that the Ingush in their mountain fastnesses accept one Englishman, the blithe and bookish Larry, as a top-management rebel leader, and that another Englishman, Cranmer of the prayer-book name, is escorted—roughly, but escorted—through the underworlds of Russia so he can patch things up with his old school chum. Such questing adventures take us back to "The Four Feathers" and "The Man Who Would Be King," to the outposts of T. E. Lawrence and Rider Haggard, to Victorian times when the great, multicolored globe existed as a vast playing field on which truehearted Englishmen could chase their personal rainbows while the picturesque heathen cheered. ♦

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RECOMMENDED READING

Bless Me, Father

by Mark Kriegel
(Doubleday; $22)

In this first novel, Frank Battaglia—a bullying West Village wise guy nostalgic for the golden age of gangsterism and haunted by the shame of his failed boxing career—decides it's time for his son Nicky to put on the gloves. And Nicky, the genial sixteen-year-old protagonist, begins to realize the depths of his father's treachery. The author displays a thrilling knowledge of the finer points of fighting and, some theatrical plot twists notwithstanding, skillfully conveys the sense of a faded past embedded in the present.

Salmon P. Chase: A Biography

by John Niven
(Oxford; $35)

As Secretary of the Treasury, Chase (1808-73) successfully managed a huge Civil War economy; as Chief Justice, he reluctantly presided over Andrew Johnson's impeachment. A moral-minded champion of individual liberty, who considered Lincoln "not anti-slavery enough," he was also a sufficiently pragmatic politician to switch party allegiance as it suited him. In detailing Chase's quest for ever higher office, the author reveals a complex will. "A good man," someone observed, "but his theology is unsound. He thinks there is a fourth person in the Trinity."

Betrayals

by Charles Palliser
(Ballantine; $23)

A mystery within an enigma within a conundrum might be one way to describe these stories within stories, but, finally, they are a kind of joke on the art of storytelling. There are pastiches of Kipling, Conrad, and de Man; a story told with oblique humor through a diary; and another told by way of letters. Each narrative connects in surprising ways with the others, and teasing hints run throughout, involving scorpions, resolutions of murders, self-important windbags, and a deerstalker cap.

An Altogether Different Language

by Anne Porter
(Zoland; $16.95 cloth, $10.95 paper)

Porter emerges as a contemporary psalmist in this bountiful first collection of poems written over the past sixty years. Most often, these poems look to the landscape and to the hearth for moral instruction and revelation—to "the two joined petals of a small / Tooth-white clamshell" that "mimic / The opening of wings or of a song-book." And, while they often take on ancient spiritual themes—retribution, forgiveness, humility—the effect of their exactitude and perspective is strikingly modern.

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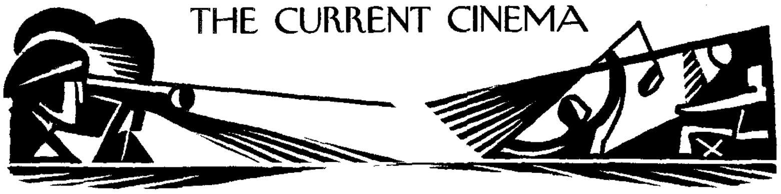
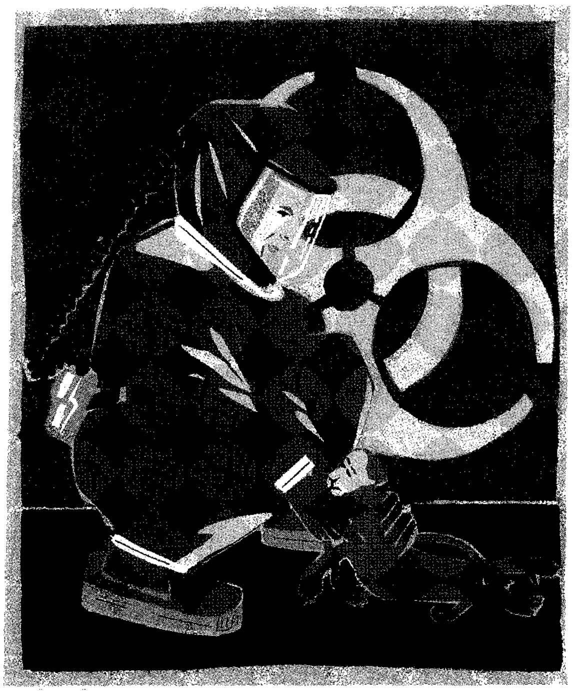


THE ENEMY WITHIN

Panic and propaganda: "Outbreak" and "I Am Cuba."

BY TERRENCE RAFFERTY

THE biohazard thriller "Outbreak," directed by the action-movie specialist Wolfgang Petersen ("In the Line of Fire"), is a textbook example of Hollywood's ability to make something new look very old and very familiar. The screenplay, by Laurence Dworet and Robert Roy Pool, takes off from the recent alarming reports of deadly viruses emerging from the rain forests of Central Africa. "Outbreak" invents a virus, Motaba, which, like the Ebola and Marburg viruses described by Richard Preston in his best-seller "The Hot Zone," and by Laurie Garrett in her book "The Coming Plague," ravages its victims with almost unthinkably grisly symptoms: infected people hemorrhage uncontrollably and their internal organs liquefy. Seen under a microscope, Motaba is virtually identical to Ebola—in this case, a thread with three loops at one end and a hook at the other. But it's Ebola on fast-forward, incubating in a few hours and killing within a day—a virus for short attention spans.



Dustin Hoffman, hermetically sealed, closes in on a deadly virus.

MARK GAGNON

In "Outbreak," the speedy little serial killer, travelling inside a monkey from Zaire, arrives in the United States and runs amok in a Northern California town called Cedar Creek. Thrillers need good villains, and this picture has a dandy: Motaba is a silent, cunning assassin carrying out the orders of the most formidable enemy power of all, Mother Nature. Tapping into health paranoia is guaranteed to scare the audience silly, and filmmakers will undoubtedly learn to use fear of disease the way they once used the threat of nuclear catastrophe, which enhanced ordinary race-against-the-clock suspense with the possibility of apocalypse. Something was bound to succeed the bomb as the ultimate terror generator in big-budget thrillers, and the virus is the strongest, most charismatic candidate to come along in years: it has the universal appeal and the staying power that the mass murderer, the swarthy terrorist, and the thing from outer space somehow lack. What's fascinating about "Outbreak" is that the filmmakers, while they are obviously keen to exploit a fertile new source of horror, have no idea how to tell this kind of story. Their helter-skelter experiments produce a bizarre hybrid strain of movie suspense: it's a Hot Zone

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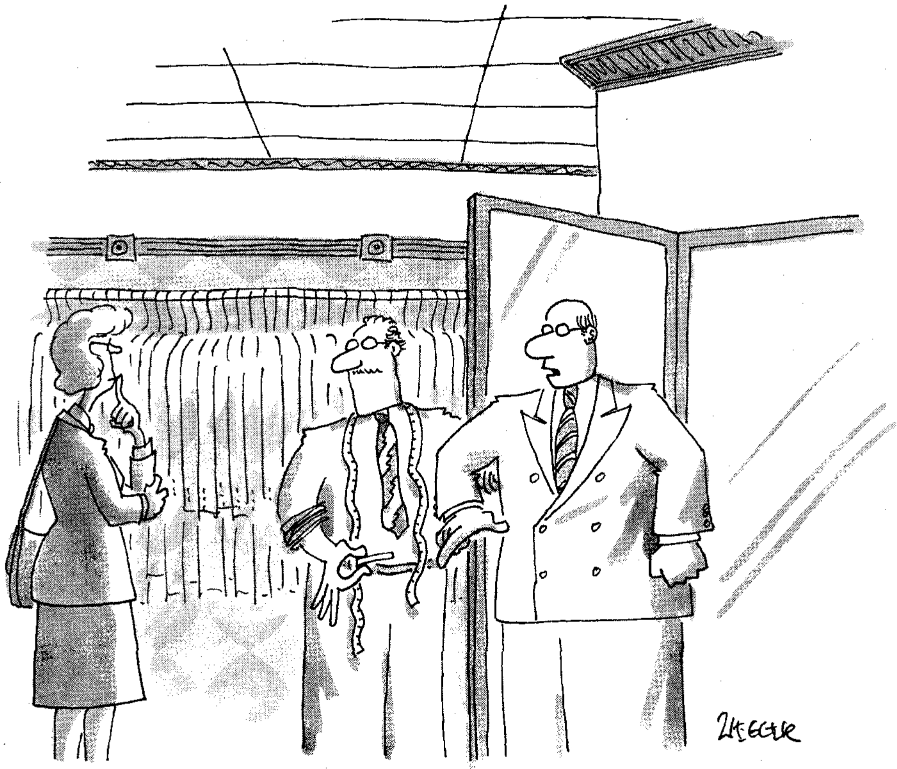

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• •

thriller with a Cold War sensibility.

Once "Outbreak" really gets rolling, the movie's tension derives less from the efforts of the hero, an Army medical researcher named Sam Daniels (Dustin Hoffman), to combat the Motaba epidemic than from his conflict with the psychotic General McClintock (Donald Sutherland)—a clear descendant of General Jack D. Ripper, who destroyed the world (while protecting his precious bodily fluids) in "Dr. Strangelove." McClintock, with precious military secrets to protect, wants to bomb Cedar Creek into oblivion; Daniels, who, after quite a bit of zipping around in a commandeered helicopter, has located the host monkey and cooked up an anti-Motaba serum, takes to his chopper to stop the air strike. What began as a medical detective story ends as the usual Hollywood amusement-park ride: thrills, chills, manly banter, ominous shots of a bomb bay opening, and an audience-rousing "Fuck you" uttered by the maverick hero. This loony climax is only the culmination of a steady escalation of preposterousness; the filmmakers' bad decisions build with doomsday logic. The itchy fingers at the controls of "Outbreak" are pushing buttons randomly.

The panic on the streets of Cedar Creek is nothing compared with the panic behind the camera. Whenever the suspense begins to flag (which is to say, every five minutes or so), the screenwriters pluck a fresh crisis out of the air: Daniels' lovable, wisecracking sidekick, Casey (Kevin Spacey), is exposed to the virus; a second, more contagious strain of Motaba suddenly appears; Daniels' gutsy ex-wife, Robbie (Rene Russo), who is working with him in Cedar Creek, jabs herself with an infected needle; the hero, having captured the host monkey, is intercepted by McClintock's choppers on his way back to the contaminated town. And when the writers need to get themselves out of a narrative jam they improvise with the same sort of shamelessness. My favorite bit of opportunistic plotting occurs during Daniels' frantic search for the source of the virus: the turning point of his investigation is his discovery, among the effects of an early Motaba victim, of two nice, clear photographs of the monkey. The device is so crude that it's almost (but not quite) endearing.

The real problem with "Outbreak" is that the filmmakers don't trust the audience to respond to a horror story in which the monster is both invisible and, worse, highly resistant to anthropomorphizing. For visual representation of the biological threat, all that the filmmakers have is the monkey, and its role in the story is necessarily limited: after it scratches and spits on a couple of people, to get the ball rolling, it becomes irrelevant to the spread of the disease. In expensive Hollywood thrillers, evil always has a face: there has to be something for the hero to punch. It's not surprising that "Outbreak" is more interested in the showdown between good guy Daniels and bad guy McClintock than in the scientists' intellectual warfare against the enigmatic virus; compared with helicopter chases, the battle of mind against mindlessness seems a little abstract. What Petersen and the screenwriters don't understand is that the very nebulousness of the conflict between human beings and the biological enemies within is what makes Preston's and Garrett's reporting so uniquely frightening. The two-fisted, this-time-it's-personal approach of conventional action movies just pulverizes such material, reduces it to nonsense. This time, it *isn't* personal.

A horror-genre filmmaker like George Romero might be able to make this sort of story work on the screen. Low-budget pictures tend to show more respect for unseen, mysterious forces (perhaps because it's cheaper not to show something than to show it). In the forties, B pictures like "Cat People" and "I Walked with a Zombie"—both produced by Val Lewton and directed by Jacques Tourneur—managed to be peerlessly unsettling without relying on visual shocks, or even, for that matter, on traditional suspense techniques; the stories are built on a slowly dawning awareness of the uncanny, and stop short of a full explanation, so the viewer's disquiet lingers. The television series "The X-Files," which tells its supernatural tales with a similar narrative economy and visual suggestiveness, recently did a biohazard story, set in the frozen north, that was simpler, quieter, and infinitely more terrifying than "Outbreak." The virus that lands on American shores in this movie doesn't, finally, seem dangerous enough, because the filmmakers treat it as something containable: they lock it in an adventure-story structure that's meant to keep the audience's terror within safe boundaries.

The movie, like a patient in denial, refuses to acknowledge that there's a powerful, ungovernable force raging through it. "Outbreak" allows the story to run its predictable course, as if it were a common cold; and dies.

MIKHAIL KALATOZOV'S 1964 propaganda epic "I Am Cuba," now getting its American theatrical première at Film Forum, is an amazing artifact. For nearly two and a half hours, the audience is bombarded with one deliriously inventive shot after another. When Kalatozov and his cinematographer, Sergei Urusevsky, keep the camera still, their deep-focus black-and-white compositions are dense, angular marvels of visual architecture. And when the camera moves there's no stopping it: it glides in and out of buildings, up and down stairs, through crowds, into a swimming pool; in one astonishing scene, it swoops out an open window and soars high above a funeral procession in the streets of Havana. The employees at Film Forum had better be prepared: they're going to be carrying ravished film students out of the theatre on stretchers.

"I Am Cuba" is, of course, a paean to the revolutionary principles of Fidel Castro, whose regime—then in its fifth year—was in Soviet eyes a model for the transformation of Third World colonies into efficient, ideologically orthodox Communist states. Cannily, Kalatozov and the screenwriters, Yevgeny Yevtushenko and Enrique Pineda Barnet, ignore the Cuba of 1964 and instead backtrack to the fifties, a time whose political soil was more conducive to the cultivation of myth. The country was then ruled by a tyrant, Fulgencio Batista, and was exploited economically by foreign (mainly American) businesses; the armed rebels led by Castro represented deliverance from oppression, and their long, difficult guerrilla campaign was genuinely heroic. The movie is constructed as an anthology of prerevolutionary folk tales: in the first, a poor, sweet-faced Havana girl loses herself in the "decadent" night life of the city and becomes a prostitute serving coarse American tourists; in the second, an old farmer who is about to be evicted from his land by the United Fruit Company sets fire to his house and his cane fields and collapses in despair; in the third, university students demonstrate and plot against the government, and are martyred; and, in the last (and dullest) segment, an ignorant campesino, driven from his home by Batista's forces, sees the light and follows it to a rebel camp in the Sierra Maestra, where Fidel's bearded troops welcome him as a comrade in arms. Floating, godlike, above the movie's small, thin characters is the solemn voice of a female narrator, intoning ripe prose poetry by Yevtushenko and Pineda Barnet—with each line, read in Spanish, immediately and eerily echoed in Russian. Sample passage: "I am Cuba. Sometimes it seems to me that the trunks of my palm trees are full of blood. Sometimes it seems to me that the murmuring sounds around us are not the ocean, but choked-back tears."

When Mother Cuba mourns, we understand that this blood and these tears are the blood and the tears of Batista's (and America's) victims, not Castro's. As you watch the film thirty years later, though, it might seem to you that the hushed voice-over doggerel of "I Am Cuba" is actually an orator's harangue, meant to drown out the murmuring sounds of dissidents confined in Fidel's prisons and work camps and the distant voices, coming across the water, of Cuban writers and artists in exile. The screenwriters' rhetoric is like a magician's spiel, setting up Kalatozov and Urusevsky's large-scale cinematic legerdemain. It's appropriate that the movie's daredevil photographic effects call attention to their technique rather than to their content. By the end of the funeral sequence, you've forgotten who's in the coffin, because all you can think about is how that camera is staying up in the air. Figuratively, there *is* no body in the coffin: the filmmakers have somehow spirited away the human reality of the story. Despite Kalatozov's grand manner, the pleasures that "I Am Cuba" provides feel oddly frivolous: you gape and giggle as you might at a Vegas illusionist making an elephant vanish from the stage. Fidel is fond of saying, "History will absolve me." Not likely, but Kalatozov does the next best thing: he makes history disappear. ♦

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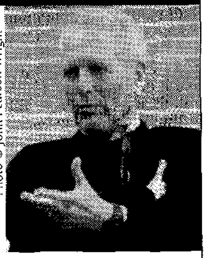

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THE THEATRE

FATHER KNOWS BEST

"The Heiress" and "Death Defying Acts"

BY NANCY FRANKLIN

A FRIEND of mine has a sensible credo when it comes to Broadway: "Expect the expected." The Lincoln Center Theatre revival of "The Heiress," at the Cort, neatly upends that formula, and exceeds all expectations. It's the kind of production that used to be thick on the ground in New York: confident, meaty, and thrilling. Ruth and Augustus Goetz's play, which is based on the Henry James novel "Washington Square," had its Broadway première in 1947, with Basil Rathbone as the charming but rigid Dr. Austin Sloper, and Wendy Hiller as his daughter, Catherine, the heiress of the title. I was afraid that a modern staging would be merely a feat of taxidermy—accurate in superficial details but lifeless—or a plodding imitation of what is by now the standard dramatic version: the painfully good 1949 movie, directed by William Wyler and starring Ralph Richardson, Olivia de Havilland, and, as Catherine's suitor Morris Townsend, Montgomery Clift. (The Goetzes also wrote the screenplay, adapting it from their stage play.) Gerald Gutierrez's production is highly polished yet emotionally brimming and alive with tension at all times—proof that the play is anything but a museum piece.

In Washington Square: Cherry Jones and Philip Bosco.

STEPHEN JOHNSON

Even if you know the outcome of the story, the performances at the Cort keep you guessing, and the ending doesn't seem preordained—it's arrived at by the mercurial imperatives of character, not by authorial machinations. As Catherine, Cherry Jones is like a bird in your hand: you're aware of the heart beating under the skin and of the creature's brave stillness barely masking its fear of being crushed. Catherine has been a lifelong disappointment to her father; she can never live up to his image of her mother, who died after giving birth to her. When she first appears in the front parlor of the Sloper house (where all the action takes place), in a voluminous red satin dress, the audience emits a low gasp, because Ms. Jones, with her round, open face and shy smile, looks so exposed despite being covered by yards of fabric. She is radiant in her plainness. Philip Bosco's Dr. Sloper is perhaps a bit heavy-handed—his cruelty lacks the easy elegance of Ralph Richardson's—but he's all too convincing as an exacting father, dutiful on the outside and selfish on the inside: a soul murderer who gives his daughter everything except unconditional love, dooming her to a futile search for his approval, and leaving her without the will to repair herself when she ultimately breaks. And Frances Sternhagen, who is always a beacon of on-key professionalism, plays Catherine's gabby and meddlesome Aunt Lavinia, adding a note of genuine Jamesian humor. The actors in the secondary roles also make a good impression: Patricia Conolly (who, strangely, resembles Olivia de Havilland) as the Doctor's other sister; Katie Finneran as Maria, the housekeeper; and Lizbeth Mackay as Morris Townsend's sister. If I give short shrift to Morris Townsend, it's no fault of the actor who plays him, Jon Tenney. Morris is an ambiguous figure: though he's the catalyst of the story, the question of whether he loves Catherine or just the fortune she is to inherit is oddly irrelevant to the drama, which is played out between Catherine and her father and then between Catherine and herself. All eyes are on Philip Bosco and Cherry Jones; you want to believe that if you fasten your gaze on them hard enough you can, before it's too late, stop him and help her.

BEARING in mind that the protagonist of the actor Stephen Fry's new novel, "The Hippopotamus," is a theatre critic who is fired for screaming during a performance, I kept my mouth shut, except for a few sotto-voce imprecations, during David Mamet's "An Interview," the first of three one-act comedies that make up the Variety Arts' new offering, "Death Defying Acts." What is it about Mamet's bullet-headed dialogue that makes me want to scream? Is it that I feel suffocated by his pushy world view, in which every transaction, every word, is about power and violence? Is it that he brings out violent impulses in me that show up the falseness of *my* world view? Is it that I'm tired of hearing the same old song, "It's a Man's Man's Man's World," blaring from Mamet's speakers? Or do I just need a vacation?

The three plays—the others are Elaine May's "Hotline," about a tremendously unpleasant woman who is planning to kill herself, and Woody Allen's "Central Park West," a piece of surpassing viciousness about marital betrayal—have the words "Written to Order" stamped all over them. Despite a couple of good, sly performances by Linda Lavin and Gerry Becker, the evening's a big downer. O.K., so comedy isn't pretty, but, to paraphrase my mother's favorite question when I was a teen-ager, why does it have to go out of its way to make itself unattractive? ♦

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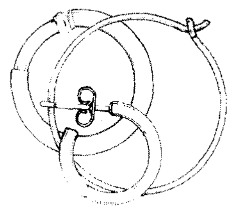
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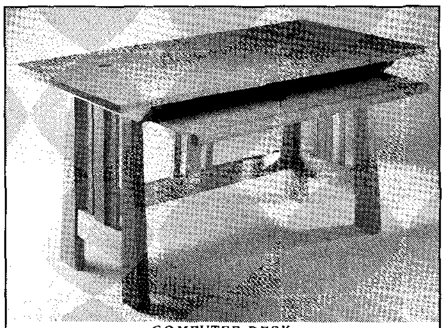
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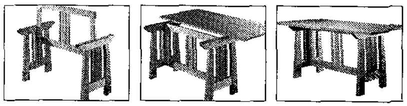
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HEAR MY SONG

BY BOBBIE ANN MASON

It wasn't the books that I didn't read,
It wasn't the teachers who tried to teach me,
It wasn't that varsity baseball coach
Who kept on telling them locker-room jokes.
It was Bobbie Ann Mason, back in high
school.
She was way too cute, she was way too cool.
How was I gonna get an education
Sittin' right in back of Bobbie Ann Mason?
—Rick Trevino, singing on Columbia
Records' "Looking for the Light."

O.K. How many people do *you* know with their own theme song? How many people have you even heard of whose full names are also song titles? John Wesley Harding? Pretty Boy Floyd? Joe DiMaggio and Mickey Mantle did have songs named for them, but not many other folks get to have a song of their own, the way I do. Well, I guess from now on you'll have to look at me through smoked glass: don't use the naked eye.

The writer Lee Smith is the only person I actually know who has come close to having her own song. Bruce Hornsby, of Bruce Hornsby and the Range, once called her up and said, "Hi, this is Bruce Hornsby." She said, "Bruce who?" Later, she told me, "He was a big star, but I didn't know it." He said he was a fan of her novels, and he invited her to his concert. These days she's a big Bruce Hornsby fan and belongs to his fan club. One of her novels inspired his song "The Road Not Taken."

Now along comes Rick Trevino, ambling down the same little-used road. He's a big country star, but I didn't know it. His new album includes a song called "Bobbie Ann Mason." I'm not sure why he's singing about me, but I won't argue. Ditty immortality is mine. That's me, no mistake. My name. On my birth certificate. Social Security card. The works. And I'm a real person, unlike Norma Jean Riley. Or Johnny B. Goode. Or sad Eleanor Rigby, who keeps her face in a jar by the door.

Of course, plenty of *first* names have been song titles: Alison, Elvira, Gloria, Layla, Maybellene. But those gals have no last names. They don't even have middle names. They have a kind of broad-spectrum immortality. Too vague for Rick Trevino—he likes to be specific.

ACTUALLY, I'm reduced to a perfect nonplus. Rick Trevino is *way* too young to be singing about me back in high school, years ago. But that's O.K. I'll take it. How well he knows me! This song is a high-school-vindication dream, the wallflower's revenge. Carrie returns! I was voted "most studious," an accolade meaning "Homecoming queen? In your *dreams*, Mason!" My time has come.

Well, Bobbie knew her history. Bobbie knew
her French.
Bobbie knew how to keep the boys in
suspense.
She teased with a touch. She teased with a kiss.
I was three long years being teased by
pretty Miss
Bobbie Ann Mason, back in high school.
She was way too cute, she was way too cool.

I hope Rick will play my song when he comes to Rupp Arena, here in Lexington, this spring. Rupp Arena is the home of the University of Kentucky Wildcats. At first, I had Rick Trevino mixed up with Rick Pitino, the Wildcats coach. Did Rick Trevino confuse me with somebody else? Maybe Rick doesn't even know I'm real. Back in high school, I didn't know *he* was real. He wasn't born yet. Reluctantly, I checked into this. It turns out that Rick didn't write the song. The guy who wrote it just liked the way my name sounded. He wrote the song for an old girlfriend whose name wouldn't fit the melody, so he plugged in mine. Does this mean I wasn't cute after all? To tell the truth, I didn't know a soupçon of French.

The trouble with this song is that it's so catchy it grabs that little gizmo in your brain that runs a tape loop. Or it does in mine, anyway. I'm being throttled by my own name, but at least I won't ever forget it. It's like an ad jingle, a singing logo, a talking T-shirt. Everybody should have a theme song. Hey, if you've got five syllables in your name, you can borrow my song! Hillary Clinton, take it for the weekend.

Of course, once you get your own song, your name is liable to enter the fuzzy realm of myth, like Stagger Lee or Jumpin' Jack Flash or Louie Louie. But what I want to know is how did Dede Dinah feel when she first heard her song on the radio? And what did she do when she found out it was really written for Peggy Sue? ♦

"Back in high school
She was way too cute"
M.H.

MARCELLUS HALL

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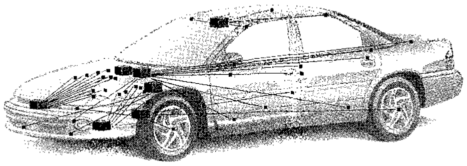

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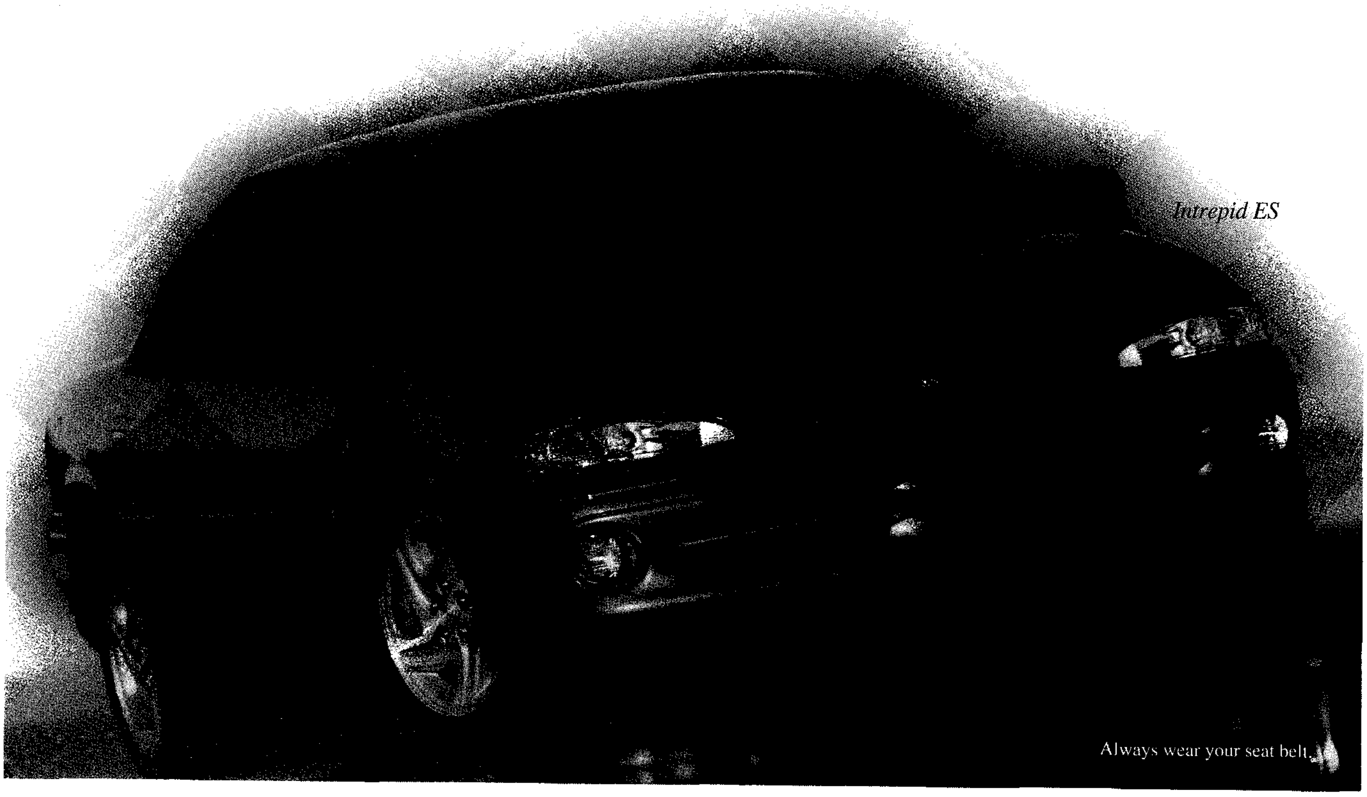

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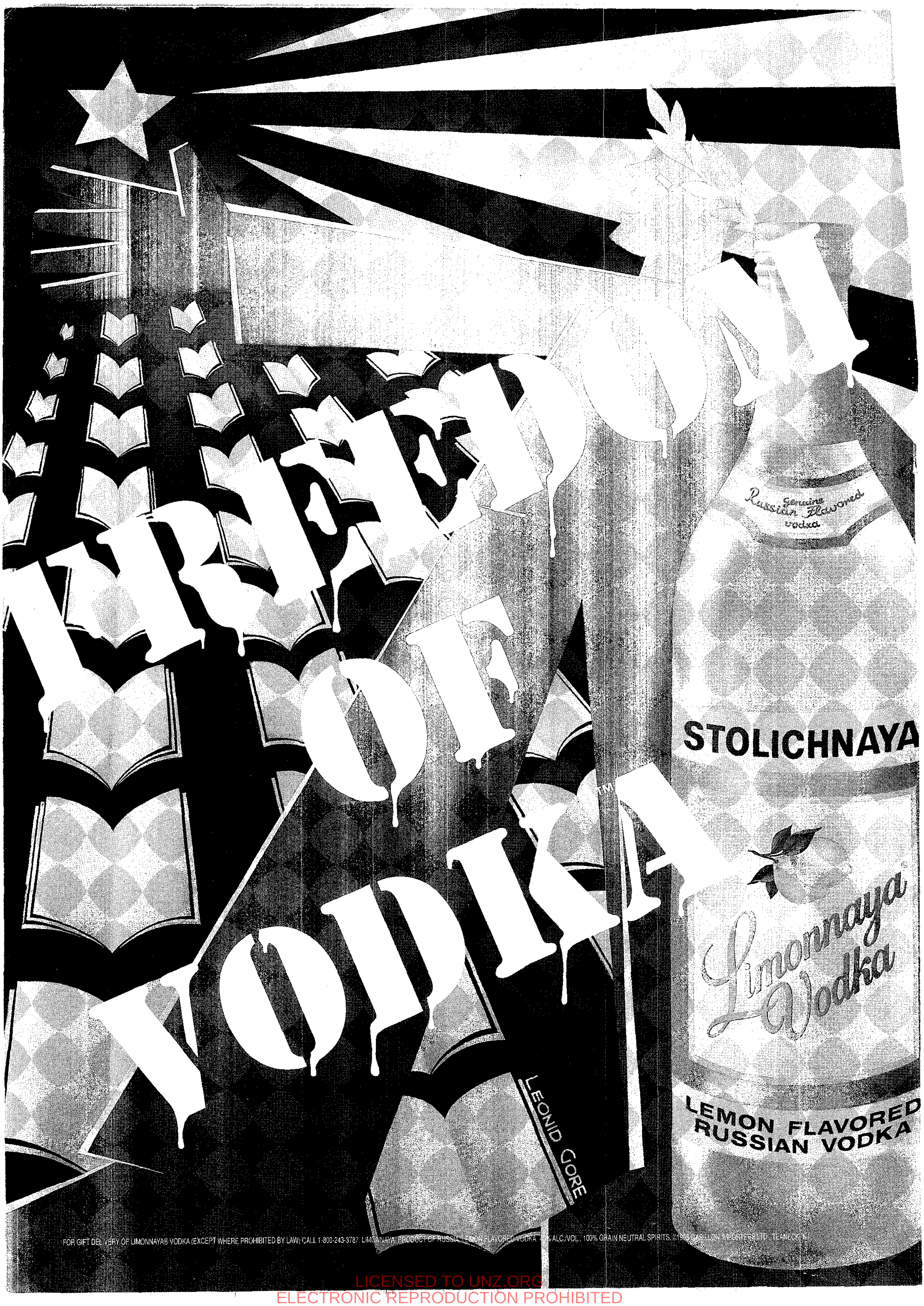
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